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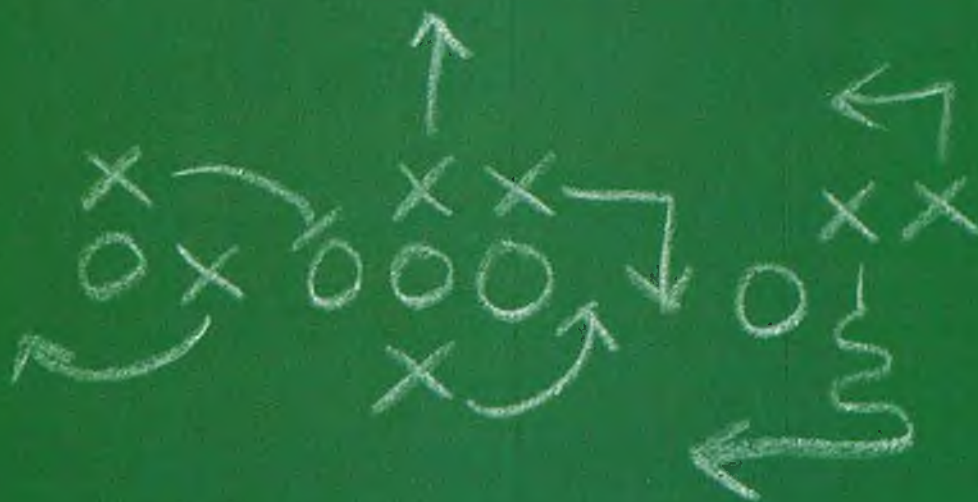
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20 Many Happy Returns

A decline in yardage led the Huskers to change the way they return punts. *By Mike Babcock*

ON THE COVER

Nebraska's Eric Johnson chases Kansas State quarterback Jonathan Beasley. *Photo by Scott Bruhn*

It Must Have Been A Hot Potato

Huskers continue great stretch run, despite not taking care of the football



Brian Hill

WHAT ARE the chances of it being 84 degrees in Lincoln on Nov. 13?

About as good as Nebraska's chances of fumbling 10 times and still handily whipping the No. 5 team in the country.

Many people were trying to predict how this Big 12 North Division showdown would turn out. Those who asked my opinion were told that Nebraska would be in trouble if it didn't hold on to the football. No way could the Huskers lose three fumbles, as they did against Texas A&M the previous week, and have a chance to defeat the mighty Wildcats.

Wrong!

The Huskers not only lost three fumbles but left the football on the Memorial Stadium Field Turf a school-record 10 times and still managed to dominate K-State to the tune of 41-15.

Even Coach Frank Solich lost count.

"Ten fumbles? That's rough," Solich said afterward. "It certainly didn't help us any. Normally, when you do that, you're on the losing side of it. The players rose above that and played tremendous. They did what they needed to do."

They certainly did.

Feeding on the energy of the loudest crowd of the season, the Huskers grabbed the previously unbeaten Wildcats and turned them upside down like Travis Ochs twisted Eric Crouch's head late in last year's 40-30 setback last year in Manhattan.

"We weren't very good, not very good at all," K-State Coach Bill Snyder said. "But they played awfully well, except for the fact that they turned the ball over, too, but our turnovers seemed to be a little more costly."

The Wildcats fumbled four times and lost all four and had a pass intercepted by the ever-present Mike Brown. They also had two punts and a field goal blocked.

Strange stuff? Definitely.

It could have been the heat — yes, the temperature at kickoff really was listed at 84 degrees — but it shouldn't have been the humidity. The press box public address announcer, Bill Bryant, made sure to point out that the humidity was just 18 percent.

Entering the game, special teams play was a concern, with K-State boasting speedster David Allen, who is chasing the NCAA record for

career punt return yardage and has tied Johnny Rodgers' career record of seven touchdowns on punt returns.

Nebraska avoided that problem by kicking away from Allen, who was credited with 0 punt returns for 0 yards. He did return a kickoff 44 yards to set up K-State's first touchdown.

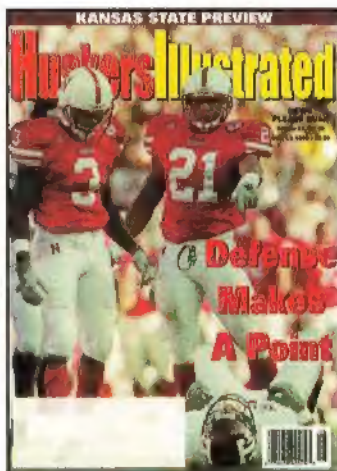
Bobby Newcombe, who had an 86-yard punt return for a touchdown against Kansas, had a 28-yard punt return to set up Nebraska's first touch-

down on Saturday.

The Huskers' punt returns are the subject of our special feature by contributing editor Mike Babcock in this issue. The story starts on Page 20.

You'll also find a look at the debut of the 1999-2000 NU men's basketball team.

And you can read a lot more about the Huskers' huge win over Kansas State. It really was a strange game. ■



Got Something To Say?

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'Life Was Different'

**New Yorker Ortiz
forms lasting
bond with players
from 'Class of '95'**

Tony Ortiz had to deal with culture shock when he arrived at Nebraska in 1995. Lincoln, Neb., is a long way from New York City, figuratively as well as literally.

"Pretty much to sum it up, life was very different," Ortiz said recently. "I had to grow accustomed to it, grow accustomed to the people and how different they were in terms of how social they were, how nice they acted toward other people. How people treated each other out here was very different."

Ortiz quickly adapted to his new environment. "It was very pleasant," he said. "It's something that grew on me and kind of (shaped) my attitude, how I do things."

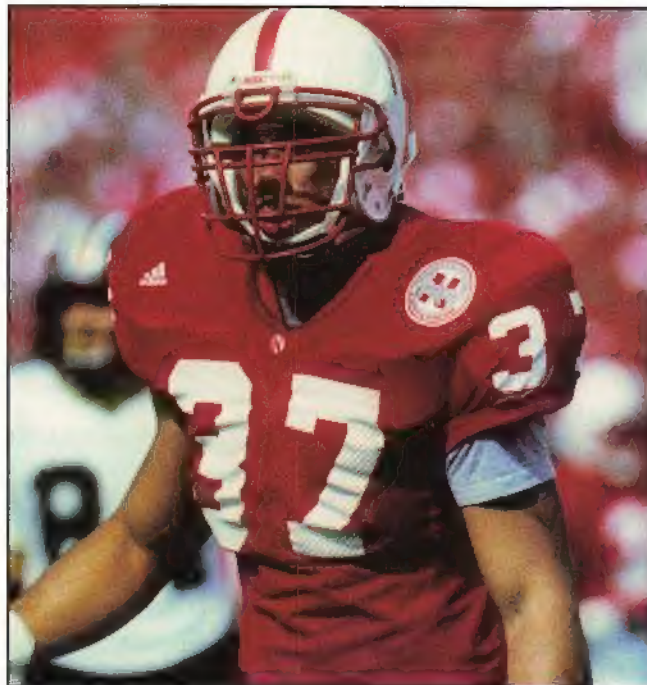
"So that's something I'll take with me."

Ortiz, who has alternated with fellow senior Brian Shaw at strongside linebacker for the past three seasons, was among 27 seniors who made their final tunnel walk at Memorial Stadium prior to the Kansas State game. His Cornhusker career is nearly at an end.

"I've enjoyed my time here and I'm ready to move on," said Ortiz.

"I'm ready to go on to bigger and better things. This place for five years has been great to me. And I'm going to miss everything about it. But good things have to come to an end."

Ortiz was one of 25



Strongside linebacker Tony Ortiz was one of 25 members of the scholarship recruiting class of 1995.

scholarship recruits in 1995. He is one of only nine who are finishing up this season. Kris Brown and Chad Kelsay completed their eligibility last season. Ahman Green left early for the NFL. Eric Warfield had only three seasons of eligibility. Terrell Farley was a junior college transfer. And Shevin Wiggins would have finished this season had he not been suspended.

That leaves 10 other scholarship recruits who

didn't make it to the end, for one reason or another.

Being around those who have survived is "the most memorable thing" about his five years at Nebraska, Ortiz said. "That will probably stick out in my mind the most."

"A lot of these guys have grown to be my brothers, have grown to be my best friends. I'm going to have relationships with these people for the rest of my life. That's something I'll

cherish. You can go on in life and know you have these people you've gone through victories and losses with."

Kelsay, Green, Warfield and Kris Brown all are playing in the NFL, which is what Ortiz would like to do. "It's just great to see them accomplish the things they've accomplished," he said. "Not only that, but to keep in contact with them and create friendships with them, and to know they've gone on to bigger and better things and you're soon to follow, that's something to appreciate."

He also has grown to appreciate people in Nebraska.

"I realized that people out here were just average, nice people, and they supported the players. They supported everything about the program," Ortiz said. "That's something I grew to love, how much they appreciated me and my teammates as players."

Four members of the 1996 scholarship recruiting class are finishing their careers this season: Ralph Brown, Mike Brown, Steve Warren and Eric Johnson. Larry Henderson was a junior college transfer in this year's scholarship recruiting class. The remainder were walkons. ■

SCHOLARSHIP RECRUITING CLASS OF 1995

Derek Allen, DL	Russellville, Ark.	Chad Kelsay, RE	Auburn, Neb.
*Matt Baldwin, C	Arvada, Colo.	*Frankie London, WB	Lake Charles, La.
Andy Bilanzich, P	Park City, Utah	Karnell Matthews, DB	St. Peters, Mo.
Kris Brown, PK	Southlake, Texas	*Tony Ortiz, SLB	New York, N.Y.
Jeff Clausen, OL	Dixon, Ill.	*Jeff Perino, QB	Durango, Colo.
*T.J. DeBates, TE	Stewartville, Minn.	Jerome Peterson, DB	Port Allen, La.
Brandon Drum, DL	Columbus, Neb.	Chris Rainey, DB	Minneapolis, Minn.
Terrell Farley, LB	Columbus, Ga.	Kareem Sears, LB	Enid, Okla.
Lonnie Fulton, OL	Grand Island, Neb.	*James Sherman, OG	LaVerne, Calif.
Ahman Green, IB	Omaha, Neb.	Eric Warfield, FS	Texarkana, Ark.
*Julius Jackson, WLB	Gainesville, Texas	Shevin Wiggins, WB	Palmetto, Fla.
Marcus Johnson, OL	Oceanside, Calif.	*Aaron Wills, RE	Omaha, Neb.
*Adam Julch, OT	Omaha, Neb.	*Indicates players who are finishing this season.	

MEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Nov. 23 — Eastern Illinois 7:05 p.m.; **26-28** — The Hoop & Quill Classic, St. Charles, Mo.: Friday — Southern Mississippi, 9:20 p.m.

Dec. 3-4 — Ameritas Classic: Friday — Nebraska vs. Western Carolina, 6:30 p.m.; Monmouth vs. Columbia, 8:30 p.m. Saturday — Consolation, 6 p.m.; Championship, 8:30 p.m.; **9** — at Creighton, 7:05 p.m.; **11** — Pittsburgh, 1:05 p.m.; **18** — vs. Arizona (at Las Vegas), 8:30 p.m.; **20** — San Francisco, 7:05 p.m.; **22** — Oral Roberts, 7:05 p.m.; **31** — Minnesota, 1:05 p.m.

Jan. 4 — Pacific, 7:05 p.m.; **8** — at Kansas St., 7 p.m.; **12** — Iowa St., 7:05 p.m.; **15** — at Kansas, 8 p.m.; **19** — Texas Tech, 7:05 p.m.; **22** — Baylor, 1:05 p.m.; **25** — at Texas, 8 p.m.; **29** — Kansas St., 7:05 p.m.

Feb. 5 — Missouri, 12:45 p.m.; **8** — at Colorado, 8 p.m.; **12** — at Iowa St., 7 p.m.; **14** — Oklahoma, 8 p.m.; **19** — at Oklahoma St., 8 p.m.; **23** — Kansas, 8 p.m.; **26** — Colorado, 12:45 p.m.

March 1 — at Missouri, 7 p.m.; **4** — at Texas A&M, 12:45 p.m.; **9-12** — at Big 12 Tournament, Kansas City.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL SCHEDULE

Nov. 19-21 — Time Warner Cable Classic: Friday — Southern Illinois vs. Wisconsin, 5:35 p.m.; Georgia Southern vs. Nebraska, 8:05 p.m. Sunday — Consolation, 12:35 p.m.; Championship, 3:05 p.m.; **26** — at Montana, 8:05 p.m.

Dec. 2 — Drake 7:05 p.m.; **6** — Washington, 7 p.m.; **9** — Brigham Young, 7:05 p.m.; **12** — Creighton, 1 p.m.; **19** — at Wyoming, 3 p.m.; **29-30** — St. Peter's Tournament: Wednesday — UAB vs. Nebraska, 4:30 p.m.; Yale vs. St. Peter's, 6:30 p.m.; Thursday — Consolation, 4:30 p.m.; Championship, 6:30 p.m.

Jan. 3 — at UC Santa Barbara, 9 p.m.; **8** — Texas, 3 p.m.; **11** — at Kansas, 7:05 p.m.; **15** — at Iowa St., 3 p.m.; **18** — Missouri, 7:05 p.m.; **22** — Texas A&M, 7:05 p.m.; **26** — Colorado, 7:05 p.m.; **30** — at Kansas St., 1 p.m.

Feb. 2 — Iowa St., 7:05 p.m.; **5** — at Oklahoma, 3 p.m.; **9** — at Colorado, 8 p.m.; **13** — Kansas, Noon; **16** — at Texas Tech, 7 p.m.; **19** — at Baylor, 7:05 p.m.; **22** — Oklahoma St., 7:05 p.m.; **26** — Kansas St., 7:05 p.m.

March 2 — at Missouri, 7 p.m.; **7-11** — at Big 12 Tournament, Kansas City, Mo.

QUICK HITS

What's Happening In Nebraska Athletics?

SOLICH'S SECOND YEAR NOT NECESSARILY EASIER

Things are supposed to get easier the second time around, right? Nebraska football coach Frank Solich wouldn't agree. His second season has been more difficult than his first.

"It's unbelievable," he said. "It's harder. No question. Hands down."

Saying no to the countless requests for speaking engagements is "one thing I've learned to do," he said. "That was a hard thing because you want to accommodate people. But you just can't do it all. You have to turn down some things. I learned that right away."

Solich still talks with Tom Osborne, his predecessor, regularly. And "when we see each other, the conversation always gets around to football but not really any strategy," said Solich.

MCBRIDE NOMINATED FOR ASSISTANT AWARD

Defensive coordinator Charlie McBride has been nominated for the American Football Coaches Association NCAA Division I-A assistant football coach of the year award.

"I think it's tremendous for Charlie," said Coach Frank Solich. "It's tremendous for our defensive unit and our defensive staff. And it's tremendous for our program overall."

McBride is in his 23rd year as a Cornhusker assistant and his 18th as defensive coordinator.

"I think it's a well-deserved honor in our mind," Solich said. "Certainly, he's the guy. He's done it with consistency over the years, and has always produced great football teams on the defensive end of it, that have played tremendously hard every time they've stepped on the field."

"When you add that all up, there's good reason for him to be on it (the list)."

SHAW, ORTIZ PLATOON SITUATION UNIQUE

Brian Shaw and Tony Ortiz have alternated at strongside linebacker the last three seasons. The situation has been unique, according to linebackers coach Craig Bohl.

"It takes two guys who really have an unselfish attitude, who want to put the team first as opposed to individual goals," Bohl said. "As a result of that, what they've done is, they've made their game better. We've gotten the best of Brian Shaw. And we've gotten the best of Tony Ortiz."

And few other strongside linebackers have gotten to play very much.

With Shaw and Ortiz gone next season, competition will be wide-open at the position. Walkons Rod Baker, a junior, and Scott Shanle, a redshirted freshman, will be in the thick of the competition, according to Shaw, who also came to Nebraska as a walkon.

"They're good players. They'll be fine," Shaw said.

Baker is from Hastings, Neb. Shanle is from St. Edward, Neb.

Eric Johnson and Julius Jackson also are finishing their careers at Nebraska, leaving a similar void at weakside linebacker. "It'll be interesting," Shaw said.

CRAVER EARNS RECOGNITION FOR BIG HIT

Sophomore cornerback Keyuo Craver won the Compaq "Best Hit of the Week" award for his tackle of Chris Cole in Nebraska's 37-0 victory against Texas A&M.

SIX SOCCER PLAYERS ALL-BIG 12

Six Husker soccer players were named to the All-Big 12 first team: Sharolta Nonen, Isabelle Morneau, Amy Walsh, Lindsay Eddleman, Jenny Benson and Meghan Anderson. Kelly Rheem and Christine Latham were second-team selections.

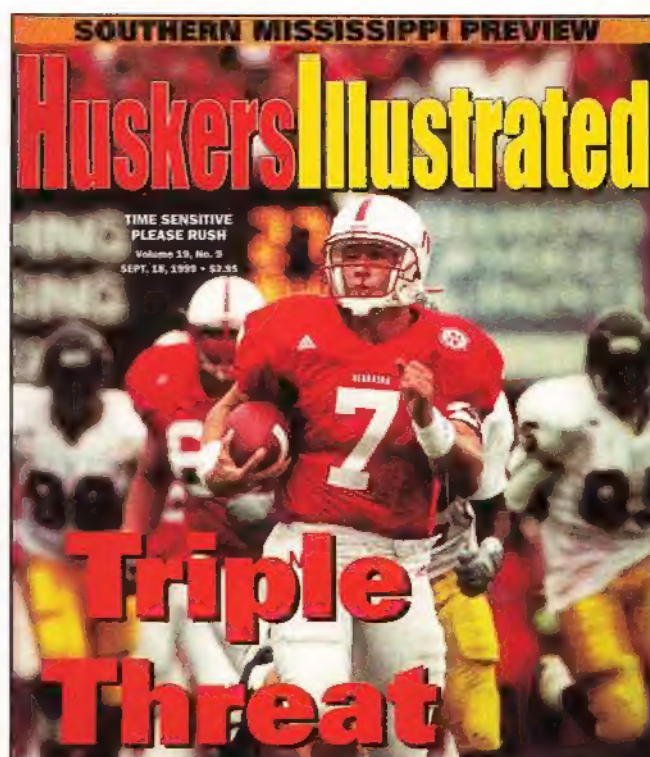
Nonen, a senior defender from Vancouver, British Columbia, was chosen as the conference player of the year, while the Huskers' John Walker was the conference coach of the year.

The Huskers took a No. 4 national ranking and a 20-1-1 record into the first round of the NCAA Tournament in Lincoln on the day after the Kansas State football game.

HUSKER ATHLETES FINALISTS FOR COMMUNITY AWARD

Three Cornhuskers were finalists for the Bank of America Community Champion of the Year award: football player Dan Alexander, spring Lesley Owens and swimmer Michael Windsch. ■

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. . . ALL THE TIME

Nebraska-Colorado Not Quite What It Was

*Barnett resurrects 'rivalry'
started by McCartney*



**Mike
BABCOCK**

AN ACQUAINTANCE was looking to buy tickets for the Nebraska-Colorado football game.

It was on short notice, in early November, so he figured he might have to deal with scalpers. But first he called the Colorado ticket office. He had to look no further.

Tickets were still available, less than three weeks before the game.

Colorado fans must not be taking this designated rival business seriously.

Gary Barnett, you'll recall, resurrected the rivalry upon being hired to replace Rick Neuheisel as head coach. "The 'former' Nebraska rivalry will be important to us," he said.

"When I was here, that game was a rivalry, and I never lost sight of that rivalry."

Presumably, he was speaking figuratively. He probably didn't give the Colorado-Nebraska game much thought while he was the head coach at Northwestern. Or maybe he did.

Maybe that's why Northwestern was 43-56-2 in his seven seasons.

In any case, Barnett announced he would treat the Nebraska game as special, an approach that worked, or didn't, for Coach Bill McCartney, under whom he was an assistant.

Colorado defeated its "rival" twice and tied it once in McCartney's 13 seasons, so the designation didn't work magic. But there were no red automobiles in the vicinity of the football offices.

The rivalry remained one-sided because Nebraska refused to be drawn into it.

Neuheisel dropped the idea, and although Colorado never defeated Nebraska during his four seasons, the last three games in the series were decided by a combined 10 points.

Former Cornhusker Coach Tom Osborne claimed every game on his team's schedule was big, an approach that was effective even though it stretched the imagination on occasion.

And Frank Solich has followed Osborne's lead regarding rivalries.

That's not to say Nebraska hasn't been a part of a rivalry, however. No matter how much Osborne might have tried to downplay it, the Cornhuskers' football rival used to be Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma game was the last on Nebraska's schedule all but nine seasons from 1950 to 1995. The Cornhuskers finished the regular season with Hawaii four times during that

stretch. They finished with Kansas State twice and with Missouri, Colorado and Miami once each.

Otherwise, the season built to the Oklahoma game, and after Bob Devaney came to Nebraska in 1962, the game directly affected the conference championship just about every season.

Most seasons, the Nebraska-Oklahoma game was played on Thanksgiving weekend, and often on Thanksgiving Day. It was a tradition, like Michigan-Ohio State, Notre Dame-Southern California or Harvard-Yale, if you're more into the academic side of intercollegiate football.

The game wasn't as important to Oklahoma as it was to Nebraska, of course. The Sooners' biggest rival has always been Texas. But the Nebraska game was special in Norman, too.

Granted, the game wasn't the same after Barry Switzer was replaced as head coach and the once-mighty Sooners had to deal with the problems created by NCAA sanctions.

The Cornhuskers won their last three games against Oklahoma by a combined 179-28.

But first-year head coach Bobby Stoops is reviving the program, and he'll have the Sooners contending for the Big 12 south division title in short order.

For a time, it appeared Nebraska and Oklahoma might play this season in the Big 12 championship game at San Antonio, Texas. But that's not going to happen now.

And there was talk that the Cotton Bowl might try to work out a deal that would match the Cornhuskers and Sooners if neither was the conference champion.

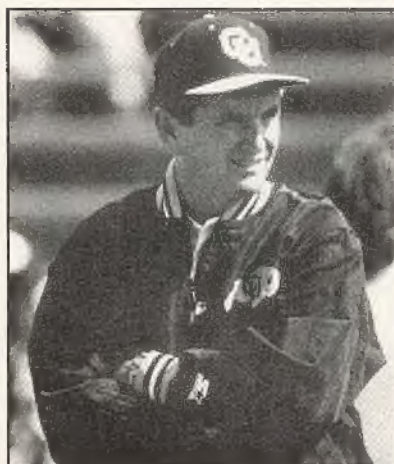
But that isn't likely to happen now either.

Traditionalists, whose numbers are dwindling, will have to wait until next season for the Nebraska-Oklahoma series to resume in the Big 12's two-on, two-off rotation for interdivisional games.

With Kansas State's dramatic success in recent seasons, the Big 12 ought to consider scheduling Nebraska-Kansas State instead of Nebraska-Colorado on Thanksgiving weekend.

Coach Bill Snyder has elevated Kansas State to the level of a perennial contender in the Big 12's north division. And there's no reason to think Nebraska won't continue to be.

The bottom line is, designated rivalry or not, the Colorado game doesn't generate the excitement that the Oklahoma game did, not in Nebraska and apparently not in Colorado. The odds were against ever buying tickets from the Sooner ticket office within three weeks of the Nebraska game. ■



Bill McCartney coached 13 seasons at Colorado and defeated "rival" Nebraska twice.

Ex-Husker Walker Changes Polk's Outlook

'I knew what he was thinking by the way he looked at me'



Bob SCHALLER

CARLOS POLK had to say "see you later" to a friend in late October.

Kenny Walker, the deaf former Husker and Denver Bronco, worked as a graduate assistant the past year for the University of Nebraska. His "project" was Polk, who was about 20 pounds undersized and substantially lacking in raw strength to take over as the "quarterback" of Nebraska's defense at middle linebacker.

"Kenny changed my whole outlook on a lot of things," Polk, a junior, said after recording eight tackles, including five solo stops, against Texas A&M Saturday in NU's 37-0 shutout.

Walker moved to Iowa to start a new career. After his career as a Husker, he played two seasons in Denver and was cut when Dan Reeves left to, at the time, take over the New York Giants. Without a professional football home — no other NFL team was interested in Walker, despite the fact that he had started the previous season, in 1992, for the Broncos — Walker went to Canada. With the tax structure, Walker barely made enough to make ends meet. He came back to Nebraska and moved just over the border into Iowa, where he was a football coach for the Iowa School for the Deaf until last year, when he rejoined the Huskers as a weight room assistant coach.

Walker and Polk's relationship began after last season ended, and in early January, Walker began training Polk in the weight room.

"Right away, it was really hard to get a read on him," Polk said. "I didn't know what he was thinking, and there was the communication problem."

That worked itself out in time.

"Kenny taught me so much — I'd be tired, and he'd tell me, 'Just one more set,'" Polk said. "And then I'd do that one, and he'd say, 'OK, good, one more set.' He was killing me."

And saving Polk's career in the process. Polk put on 20 pounds of muscle.

"We weighed in and couldn't believe how much weight I had gained — I didn't feel like I had gained any, but I had gained a lot," Polk said. "I thought, 'What if I'm not as fast?' Then we did the running, and I was faster — I tied the record for my position in the 10-yard dash. I did my best in all the running and all the lifting. Over the summer, we had a great time lifting, and I just kept getting in better and better shape because Kenny really pushed me."

And the communication worked itself out.

"I knew what he was thinking by the way he looked at me," Polk said. "We had our own way of communicating. I also learned what a character Kenny is — he has a great sense of humor. But mostly, he's just a great person who brought a lot of focus to my life. He's a pretty amazing man."

So is the Nebraska defense — shutting out a team that was the Big 12 Conference champion last year, and a team that, indeed, beat the Huskers last season.

"We have a lot of confidence in ourselves, but we're not overconfident," Polk said. "We know what we have to do when we go out there."

Walker is in Shenandoah, Iowa, now, a good distance removed from the Huskers, and the special player — Polk — who he holds close to his heart.

"He had to move on," Polk said, "but I will never forget him."

Likewise, Polk is making an impression on opponents this season. After recording a team-high seven tackles against California, Polk's name entered the national spotlight, where it has remained since. In fact, Cal Coach Tom Holmoe said Polk has emerged from essentially nowhere to become one of the top players at his position in the country.

"Carlos Polk," Holmoe said, "is one of the best middle linebackers that I've seen in a while. He plays side to side very well."

Polk credits his teammates for the success he's had, and he said that even a string of shutouts won't make this group complacent.

"You have to have guys who make plays," Polk said. "Look at what our defensive line has done with the line of scrimmage — they've owned it. Look at the pressure on the quarterback from the outside linebackers and rush ends. Look at what our secondary does not just in coverage, but in stopping the run."

"If one of us misses an assignment, there is someone there to cover. But we're not missing many assignments, so it's going well."

"We're not going to look ahead. If we do that, we lose the element of surprise that we have in terms of keeping the other team's offense in check. We want the shutout — of course we do. But we're not going to talk about doing it for this or that game down the line. We'll go to the next game, and it all starts over there — it doesn't matter what you've done the week before." ■



After two seasons as a backup, Carlos Polk has moved into the starting lineup as a junior.

Bob Schaller covers the Huskers for the Scottsbluff Star-Herald. He has also written several books, including "Touchdown Tommie" and "Roar of Silence: The Kenny Walker Story." Bob can be reached at schallerrc@aol.com.

Anything's Possible In The Big 12

*Colorado's Barnett says it'll be tougher to dominate
the way Nebraska did in the old Big Eight*



**Curt
McKEEVER**

WITH TWO GAMES TO PLAY, Kansas State, Nebraska and Colorado all had a shot at winning the Big 12 North Division.

In the South, Texas, Texas Tech, Oklahoma and Texas A&M all were mathematically alive.

Of course, Kansas State and Texas each had chances to lock up berths to the Big 12 championship in San Antonio three weeks before that game. But the fact that so many teams remained in the hunt so late in the season is evidence to rising parity around the league.

Want more examples?

Last-place Baylor began the season with a 30-29 overtime loss to Boston College. The Eagles were 6-2 entering November.

Iowa State had a 21-point on Kansas State before losing.

Kansas played Nebraska even late into the fourth quarter before falling.

Colorado had the ball late with a chance to win at Kansas State.

Texas A&M was a favorite at Oklahoma and promptly suffered its most-lopsided loss in 98 years.

Texas began the season by losing at home to North Carolina State.

Texas Tech lost at home to North Texas, which has won once since.

The unknown from week to week is no doubt hard for Nebraska fans used to the Huskers' dominance prior to the formation of the Big 12 to handle.

Texas won the inaugural title after going just 7-4. NU won the 1997 title, but Texas A&M became the third champion by knocking off Kansas State last year.

Hey, things might be rough on the bottom, but it's pretty tough at the top, too. Just ask Colorado Coach Gary Barnett.

"There are some programs that inherently will be able to stay up there, and Nebraska is one of those, probably, that will be able to do it," he said. "It has a lot to do with the surroundings. It has a lot to do with the environment. It has a lot to do, of course, with the coaches and the tradition.

"But it'll be harder and harder for Nebraska. I think combining the two conferences (the Southwest and Big Eight) will make it much more difficult for any team in this conference to dominate quite to the extent that Nebraska did or we did for three years. But Nebraska is certainly the program that has maintained itself over the last 20 years or so."

Nebraska won the last four Big Eight titles outright, and shared another with Colorado in 1991. The Buffaloes had been on top alone in 1990 and 1989.

During Barnett's first season as a Colorado assistant, in 1984, the Buffs were 1-10. The next season, they shot up to 7-4. Thereafter, CU would finish lower than second in the Big Eight only twice.

When they were winning the 1989 league title and narrowly missing out on a national championship, Bill Snyder was embarking on his coaching career at Kansas State. The Wildcats promptly went 1-10 — just like the 1984 Buffaloes. Two years later, they went 7-4. And after a 5-6 season, they've following up by winning at least nine games the past seven years.

Should we draw any parallels to the two programs? Yes and no, says Barnett.

"Kansas State, they've allowed Bill some freedom, and he's really done a good job," he said. "Bill McCartney willed this program into existence the same way. But I think that Bill (Snyder) had a harder struggle. We had a tough struggle, too. There's no question about it. But we have a little bit longer tradition here than Bill did, and so Bill's willed and just organized that program and managed it to what it is now.

"But it's still a little bit different. I think the non-conference schedule and Bill's philosophy about that is different. And a number of other things. But he's put them in the position now where every year they have a chance to be in it."

Being in it every year is one thing. Winning it is another.

Texas A&M won three Southwest Conference crowns from 1991 to 93. The next year, the Aggies were not among a pack of four co-champions, while Texas won the last SWC crown in 1995.

While Nebraska might have had the best team the first year of the Big 12, the Huskers couldn't handle a 17-point underdog Texas team. The same thing happened to Kansas State against Texas A&M last year.

Should we expect similar drama in San Antonio on December 4?

By now, we should all know that anything's possible.

Remember that the next time someone predicts the next Big 12 dynasty on the horizon. ■



Colorado was 1-10 in 1984, Gary Barnett's first season as an assistant. After moving on to Northwestern, he has returned as head coach.

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

Quiet Linebacker Lights Buffs' Fire

Sophomore Sykes becomes leader of inconsistent Colorado defense

By Peter Jakel, Buff Sports News

It was completely out of character.

Jashon Sykes isn't the kind of player who makes a lot of noise in the locker room. He rarely criticizes the play of his teammates, but after Texas Tech ran over the Buffs, Sykes couldn't help himself.

He had to say something, anything.

"There was not fire out there," Sykes said. "I saw it before the game and being a teammate, you know it when your team isn't ready to play. Some of the guys didn't speak up, so I

Colorado

Record 6-4

S 4	Colorado St.	L, 41-14
S 11	San Jose St.	W, 63-35
S 18	Kansas	W, 51-17
S 25	@ Washington	L, 31-24
O 9	Missouri	W, 46-39
O 16	@ Texas Tech	L, 31-10
O 23	@ Iowa St.	W, 16-12
O 30	Oklahoma	W, 38-24
N 6	@ Kansas St.	L, 20-14
N 13	@ Baylor	W, 37-0
N 26	Nebraska	

NEBRASKA

Record 9-1

S 4	@ Iowa	W, 42-7
S 11	California	W, 45-0
S 18	So. Mississippi	W, 20-12
S 25	@ Missouri	W, 40-10
S 32	Oklahoma St.	W, 38-10
O 9	Iowa St.	W, 48-14
O 23	@ Texas	L, 24-20
O 30	@ Kansas	W, 24-17
N 6	Texas A&M	W, 37-0
N 13	Kansas St.	W, 41-10
N 26	@ Colorado	

doesn't

"He's a little bit ahead of what that position should produce as far as tackles go," linebackers coach Brian Cabral said. "He's a little bit ahead of that and that's a testament to his athletic ability. What's going on now is he's playing confidently, he understands the scheme and the defense, understands where he fits, how the defense works and he's making it work for him."

And Sykes' is well ahead of his time.

"No I can't say that I have (seen a

Tentative 2 Deeps

NEBRASKA OFFENSE

SE 3	Matt Davison**	6-1	180	Jr
5	Wilson Thomas	6-5	210	Fr.
LT 89	Adam Juleh***	6-5	320	Sr.
66	Jon Rutherford*	6-3	295	So
LG 83	James Sherman***	6-4	295	Sr
77	Toru Fono	6-4	330	Fr
C 54	Dominic Raiola*	6-2	295	So.
51	Matt Baldwin**	6-2	285	Sr
RG 55	Russ Hochstet**	6-3	280	Jr
64	Steve Alstadt	6-5	275	So.
RT 58	Dave Voik*	6-5	295	So.
75	Kyle Kalmorgen*	6-5	290	So.
TE 88	T.J. DeBates***	6-3	250	Sr
and 87	Tracey Wistrom	6-5	220	So.
QB 7	Eric Crouch*	6-1	195	So.
14	Jeff Perino*	6-2	210	Sr
FB 15	Will Miller**	6-1	240	Jr
35	Tyrone Uhler	6-0	230	Fr
B 38	Don Alexander**	6-0	245	Jr.
36	Correll Buckhalter**	6-0	225	Jr
WB 82	Sean Applegate**	6-9	185	Sr
and 12	Bobby Newcombe**	6-0	195	Jr.
PK 26	Josh Brown	6-2	185	Fr.

10	Arnon Wilks**			
27	Chris Kealey			
30	Steve Warren***			
40	Jason Lohr*			
42	Coren Kaiser			
43	Matt McGinn			
44	Kyle Vanden Bosch			
45	Demolay Adams			
46	Lonny Orr			
47	Brian Shaw***			
48	Carlos Fox			
49	Jemie Burrow			
50	Chris Johnson			
51	Colbie			
52	Kayce Grever			
53	Justin Strick			
54	Clint Jeline			
55	Dion Booker			
56	Mike Brown**			
57	Ralph Brown***			
58	Jeff Morris			
59	Dan Hadenfeldt			

had to speak up. I said what I had to say.

"I don't talk that much. I think I lead by example. But I see now that maybe I have to speak up a little bit more, even though I'm young on the team."

Sykes thinks of himself as a silent leader who leads with his actions, and in all honesty, there really is no need for the sophomore linebacker to say a word. You could fill a Webster's unabridged dictionary with the words that come from his actions.

Sykes, with his 6-foot-3, 225-pound frame, has been one of the positives in a defense that has been swimming in criticism. He's made 93 tackles this season, while registering 2 sacks.

Even in the games the Buffs have lost, Sykes has been as solid as any linebacker in the nation. Against Texas Tech, Sykes put seven tackles on the board, only one of which was an assisted tackle.

Sykes put together another stellar performance when the Buffs lost to Colorado State, as he pieced together a 10 tackle performance. Then there was the loss to Washington, in which Sykes nailed 14 ball carriers to the turf.

"The defense is set up for me to make a lot of tackles, but some of the tackles I make are from my effort and me running down the ball," Sykes said.

Simply put, it's Sykes making plays that the average college athlete

COLORADO
(6-4)

VS

NEBRASKA
(9-1)



Nov. 26, 1999 • 1:30 p.m. (CST) • ABC •
• Folsom Field • Boulder, Colo.

Tentative 2 Deeps

NEBRASKA OFFENSE

SE 3	Matt Davison**	6-1	180	Jr
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WB 82	Sean Applegate**	6-9	185	Sr
and 12	Bobby Newcombe**	6-0	195	Jr.
PK 26	Josh Brown	6-2	185	Fr.

COLORADO OFFENSE

WR 82	John Minardi*	6-2	195	So
19	Javon Green**	6-2	195	Jr
WR 99	M. Stiggers***	6-7	180	Sr
5	Roman Hollowel*	6-5	160	So
WT 72	Shane Cook***	6-7	310	Sr
73	Shane Culum**	6-4	310	Sr
WG 58	R. Johannsmater***	6-7	305	Sr
62	Chris Morgan**	6-3	295	Sr
C 65	Andre Gurode*	6-4	305	So
64	Martin Simmons**	6-3	310	Sr
SG 76	Brad Bedell*	6-5	315	Sr
74	Ryan Gray	6-3	305	Fr
ST 77	Justin Bales	6-4	295	Fr
51	Tom Ashworth**	6-6	265	Jr
TE 89	Daniel Graham*	6-3	235	So.
86	Brody Liddiard***	6-5	240	Sr
QB 4	Mike Moschetti*	6-0	185	Sr
8	Zac Colvin	6-4	210	Fr
TB 27	Cortien Johnson*	5-9	195	So
10	D. Cherrington***	5-10	195	Sr
FB 45	David Andrews*	6-4	250	So
33	Brandon Drumm	6-2	210	Fr
PK 9	Jeremy Aldrich***	5-11	175	Sr

PICKS

Driscoll Hill
Editor

Nebraska 27, Colorado 17

Nebraska has to be concerned about a letdown, with the bye week coming after two huge wins at home. But if the Huskers can fumble 10 times and still win by 26 points, they can survive this challenge. The last three meetings have been decided by a total of 10 points. That sounds like a good margin this time.

Mike Dabosch

Contributing Editor

Nebraska 17, Colorado 10

The Buffaloes have played well on defense at times. Their biggest problem has been an inability to run on offense, which is no different under Gary Barnett than it was under Rick Neuheisel. In any case, expect Barnett to have them well-prepared for the Cornhuskers. It hasn't been easy for Nebraska the last couple of seasons, and there's no reason to think it will be this time.

Bob Schaller

Contributing Writer

Nebraska 27, Colorado 10

Gary Barnett will help Colorado turn the corner, but not this week. The Huskers have too much on the line to let Colorado stay with them for too long. The Buffs have a quarterback who really should be in Division I-AA or Division II, and that should have the Husker rush ends and defensive tackles champing at the bit.

Terry Douglass

Grand Island Independent
Sports Editor

Nebraska 27, Colorado 23

Anything can happen when Nebraska makes the trip to hostile Boulder, Colo. The Buffs will be sky high now that Bill McCartney disciple Gary Barnett is Colorado's head man. The Huskers are once again Colorado's red-letter date on the schedule. Look for Nebraska's defense to help it escape a late CU rally.

sophomore play like that)," Cabral said. "Without a doubt (he's one of the best Cabral has coached). He's playing



Jashon Sykes had 14 tackles, 10 of them unassisted, against Nebraska as a true freshman in 1998.

as well as any sophomore I've had. What we asked him to do last year, we made it simple and tailored around his abilities a lot like this year. He's producing what is expected out of that position and because of his abilities he's producing a little more."

But his performance hasn't surprised anyone, considering the young linebacker made his presence known last season as a freshman.

A true freshman, Sykes tore up the opposition in 1998, pounding ball carriers for 52 total tackles, including 31 solo. That was second on the team as well as the most for a CU freshman since Ted Johnson racked up 53 in 1991.

It was the most of any true freshman since tackles were tallied in 1965.

Sykes had a career-high 14 tackles against Nebraska. Ten of those were without help from any other Buff, not to mention the two sacks. He has since smashed that record with 21 tackles against Missouri this year.

Big games were like Sykes' personal tackle party as a freshman, as he also put up huge numbers in the Buffs' Aloha Bowl victory over Oregon. Sykes hauled down seven opponents, forced a fumble and tallied one sack in the 51-43 win.

He also showed a knack for surprising the opposition in the backfield by earning seven tackles for a loss on the year.

The Sporting News listed Sykes as the No. 9 linebacker in the nation in its preseason player rankings and Lindy's Football put him at No. 16.

But Sykes doesn't have much to say about the way he plays or how well he plays.

"I have intensity," Sykes said when asked to describe his style. "I like to fly to the ball and make plays. That's about it."

And he certainly isn't content with the stage he's in as a player, no matter how many lauds and praises are printed in the papers or dropped from above.

"There's so much more I want to accomplish here," Sykes said. "There's so much I want to improve on, so this is just half of it."

Said Cabral: "His strength is he wants to be a great player. He has the strength, quickness, speed and size to do that. There's still improvement needed. He understands there's more to do."

What still needs to be accomplished for Sykes includes helping this team finish this season strong.

"We know that we can't afford to lose any more games," Sykes said.

As well as Sykes has played this season, it makes one wonder why his play hasn't propelled the Buffs to more victories. But the problems the CU defense is suffering through can't be fixed by one player, even if that player is Sykes.

"I think the problem is that we go into a game, we're fired up we're intense and as the game goes on, there are mistakes and a lack of intensity," Sykes said. "So, that all goes into effect. We walk around with our heads down and then — boom, we give up a touchdown."

Still Sykes hasn't felt the burden of the defensive on his shoulders as the super star.

"It has to be a team effort," he said. "Everyone has to pitch in on it. Otherwise, it's not one for all and all for one."

BOWL-ELIGIBLE BUFFS

Colorado has won three of its last four games since a 3-3 start. The Buffaloes pounded Baylor 37-0 Saturday in Waco, Texas.

That gave CU a 5-2 record in the Big 12 and a 6-4 mark overall. The sixth win made the Buffs bowl-eligible in a season that started with a 41-14 loss to Colorado State and included a 31-10 setback to Texas Tech. ■

GAME RECAP

Deja Vu . . . But All NU



*Huskers overcome
another first-play
fumble to rumble
past fifth-ranked
Kansas State 41-15*

**Story by Mike Babcock
Photos by Scott Bruhn**

For the second week in a row, Nebraska lost a fumble deep in its own territory on the first play from scrimmage. "It was kind of like a flashback to last week," said quarterback Eric Crouch.

"It was almost an amazement to me that something like that could happen two weeks in a row."

Even more amazing, perhaps, the Cornhuskers' Kyle Vanden Bosch blocked the field goal attempt that followed the lost fumble, just as he had done the previous week against Texas A&M.

"It was kind of weird because you had the feeling it was going to happen again," rover Mike Brown said. "When they lined up for that field goal, it was like: 'He's going to get it.'"

"They" were the Kansas State Wildcats, who came to Memorial Stadium on a balmy November day, undefeated and ranked fifth in both major polls, and left with a 41-15 defeat.

At left, Julius Jackson (50) helps the officials with the call, after Mike Brown recovered a fumble late in the third quarter. At right, third-team I-back Dahrran Diedrick breaks free from KSU line-backer Travis Litton, with support from tackle Adam Julch.





For the second week in a row, Brown claimed Vanden Bosch's block was the key to victory.

Vanden Bosch didn't necessarily agree. But he did acknowledge the impact such a play can have. "It's all about momentum," he said. "I think that took a little wind out of their sails."

Kansas State had recovered the ball at the Nebraska 28-yard line, but could manage only 5 yards before sending in Jamie Rheem to attempt the field goal, from 40 yards.

It was pretty much downhill from there for the Wildcats, whose hopes of beating Nebraska for a second consecutive season collapsed under the weight of a Cornhusker offense that was effective against the nation's No. 2-ranked defense, even though it fumbled a school-record 10 times.

Even Coach Frank Solich was surprised at that number.

"It was 10 times? That's rough there," he said. "That certainly didn't help us any. Normally when you do that, you're on the losing side. So I guess that means the players rose above it."

Granted, Nebraska lost only three of the fumbles. But the mistakes were such that Dan Alexander, who lost the fumble on the first play, spent the remainder of the game on the sideline.

And Correll Buckhalter, who lost the second fumble at the Kansas State 1-yard line late in the first quarter, got only seven carries, leaving Dahrran Diedrick to play most the game at I-back.

Diedrick, a redshirted freshman from Scarborough, Ontario, Canada, carried 14 times for 93 yards and a touchdown, on a 46-yard run early in the fourth quarter, after the outcome was clear.

"I had as much confidence in giving him the ball as I had with Eric having the ball," Solich said.

Oh yes, Crouch. He carried 27 times for 158 yards and two touchdowns, against a defense that had allowed an average of only 93.2 yards rushing and 11.4 points per game.



Eric Crouch (right) is congratulated by split end Wilson Thomas after one of Crouch's two first-quarter touchdown runs. The sophomore quarterback rushed for 90 yards in the first quarter and 158 overall

The 27 carries were a school record for a quarterback, breaking the previous mark of 25, set by Johnny Bordogna, also against Kansas State in 1952 — he gained 143 yards.

"I thought, he was tremendous," Solich said of Crouch, who carried only nine times in the second half. "He showed a great deal of athletic ability but also just a great deal of heart."

The plan wasn't necessarily for Crouch to carry as often as he did.

"It's something that works itself out," said Solich. "We see how the game plan works in the first few series, knowing that we're going to have to make adjustments. Then we kind of go from there. It became obvious to us that there were some things we could get done against them."

"We felt we needed to get something going on the ground because if you're just going to try to drop back and throw the ball against them, you're going to be in trouble."

Crouch also was effective throwing the ball during the first half, completing 6-of-12 passes for 81 yards to help keep the Wildcats off-balance on defense.

In the second half, however, Crouch was only 2-for-5, for a net of minus-12.

One of those completions was to himself, for a 14-yard loss. The ball was deflected by a defender, and out of instinct, it appeared, he caught the ball instead of letting it fall incomplete.

With a 24-9 halftime lead, Nebraska became conservative on offense in the second half. "We weren't necessarily trying to sit on the lead and play the clock," said Solich. "But on the other end of it, we didn't want to do anything that was foolish, either, that would cause us to be put in a hole."

The Cornhuskers scored 17 points in the fourth quarter, on a 30-yard field goal by Josh Brown and touchdowns by Diedrick and weakside linebacker Eric Johnson, who returned a fumble 15 yards. Vanden Bosch forced the fumble, one

of four by the Wildcats, all of them lost.

Nebraska's defense also produced an interception and blocked two punts, the first by Randy Stella for a safety, on the possession that followed Buckhalter's lost fumble at the Wildcat 1-yard line.

The Blackshirts were almost always there to bail out the offense. "They couldn't play four quarters with Nebraska," said middle linebacker Carlos Polk. "We were too physical for them."

Jonathan Beasley, Kansas State's starting quarterback, could attest to that. He completed only 3-of-19 passes before giving way to Adam Helm, who was sacked five times for 33 yards in losses.

"We're capable of playing some dominating football," Brown said. "We just kept competing. Even when they had us on the ropes, we just kept coming and coming and coming."

"We have a lot of confidence. We go into games intending to dominate teams and play really well. We don't settle for anything less. We want to play well every play, every series."

Kansas State gained 173 of its 234 total yards in the first half, including 146 in the second quarter.

"We were just so close to making those plays in the first half," said Brown. "Eventually things have to start happening for you if you keep putting the pressure on them . . . things are going to happen."

Brown had six tackles and the interception that set up Diedrick's touchdown in addition to the forced fumble. Polk was credited with eight tackles and one sack. And Vanden Bosch had five tackles, including a sack, and, of course, that all-important blocked field attempt, his third in two weeks.

He almost had a fourth, tipping the ball on Rheem's 35-yard field goal with 25 seconds remaining in the first half. "He was close to blocking it, too," Brown said. "I heard it tip his hands."

"I got a piece of the second one," said the 6-foot-4, 270-pound Vanden Bosch.

"I didn't get much of it. It hit my fingertip."

"Last week, we knew the guy had a low trajectory, and this week, we just kind of said, hey, it worked last week, so we kind of went back to it. I don't think I have a knack for it. I think it's more luck than anything. You jump in the right place, kind of close your eyes and feel something hit your head."

It was a repeat of the previous week's game.

"We put ourselves in horrendous position at the start again," Solich said. "That was really something I think that affected everybody a little bit. But it didn't seem to affect the defense."

"They came out again and did a great job. That was a tremendous uplift for our team."

Just like the week before. ■

4TH & 1 INCHES

Notes And Quotes From The Kansas State Game

HUSKERS PLAY KEEP-AWAY FROM ALLEN

Nebraska's Dan Hadenfeldt punted five times for an average of 38.6 yards per punt. Two of his punts were downed inside the Kansas State 20-yard line, and none of them were returned.

Keeping the Wildcats' David Allen from returning a punt was a key, according to Solich.

"We didn't want Allen to touch the ball at all unless they handed it to him," Solich said. "We did not want to kick it to him. And really, when we did kick it to him on the kickoff, he made you pay."

"So not allowing him to touch the ball many times on that end of it, special teams play, I think was vital. As you could see, he changes field position immediately."

Allen returned the second half kickoff 54 yards to give Kansas State good field position at the Cornhusker 44-yard line. But the Wildcats went three-downs-and-punt.

That was an important series, Nebraska rover Mike Brown said. "We know they're a second-half team. That's something we harped on at halftime. They seem to play better when they're down."

DIEDRICK COULDN'T LET DEFENDER CATCH HIM

Redshirted freshman I-back Dahrnan Diedrick rushed for 93 yards and a touchdown, on a 46-yard run with 11:21 remaining in the game. "Once I got to the outside, I knew I'd make it," he said.

"The guys on the team, they'd make fun of me somehow if I let him (the defender) catch me. So I just started running as hard as I could to get it in the end zone."

Fullback Willie Miller threw a key block on the run, according to Diedrick, whose opportunity to play came as a result of fumble problems by Dan Alexander and Correll Buckhalter.

Miller also scored a touchdown, on a 4-yard run midway through the second quarter.

SENIORS MAKE MOST OF FINAL HOME GAME

The game was the last at Memorial Stadium for 27 Nebraska seniors.

The seniors have a 53-7 (.883) record over five seasons. "I was really thankful for those seniors, that they were able to go out the way they did," said Solich.

Senior Ralph Brown has started 49 consecutive games, two short of the school record, held by place-kicker Kris Brown, who now kicks for the NFL's Pittsburgh Steelers.

Ralph Brown, a two-time first-team all conference selection, is the only Cornhusker position player since World War II to have started every game since his first as a true freshman.

After the Texas A&M game, Brown reiterated a guarantee he made after last season's 40-30 loss at Kansas State, that the Cornhuskers would lose this time around in Lincoln.

"I knew a lot of people were going to come to me today, whether we won or lost . . . a lot of people were going to ask me about my comments after last year," he said.

"I was ready (both ways)."

QUARTERBACK CROUCH PLAYER OF THE GAME

Cornhusker quarterback Eric Crouch was the ABC television offensive player of the game. The sophomore from Omaha rushed for 158 yards and two touchdowns and completed 8-of-17 passes for 69 yards. The 158 rushing yards were the most by a Nebraska player this season.

Kansas State linebacker Mark Simoneau was the ABC defensive player of the game. The senior from Smith Center, Kan., was credited with 14 tackles, including eight unassisted.

H-STATE SEES REPEAT PERFORMANCE

Crouch also had a big game against Kansas State last season, rushing for 108 yards and completing 1-of-21 passes for 139 yards and three touchdowns, with one interception.

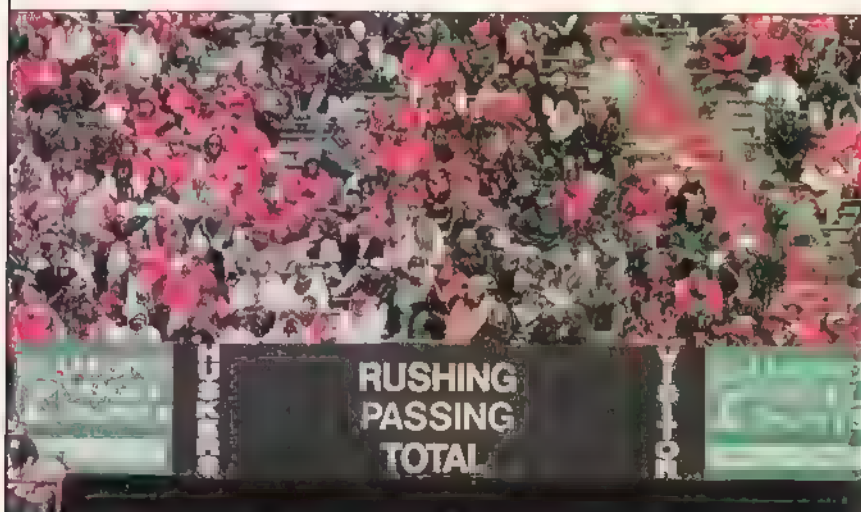
"He did a nice job. He does a very nice job executing their offense," said Kansas State coach Bill Snyder. "I think their offense in total does a nice job in executing, other than the fact that they are turning the ball over some." Some? Nebraska lost 3-of-10 fumbles against the Wildcats.

"He's a pretty elusive guy," Kansas State linebacker Ben Leber said of Crouch. "He's extremely fast. He's just a great quarterback. His knees can be a quarter-inch from the ground, and he can still pitch it. He's got so many threats. He's probably the toughest quarterback we've faced." ■



A pass from Eric Crouch is just out of the reach of tight end Tracey Wistrom, but the combination connected four times for 68 yards. Defending is Kansas State safety Jarrod Cooper.

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Big 12 Standings

(Through Nov. 13)

North Division

	W	L	W	L
	Conf.		All	
Nebraska	6	1	9	1
Kansas State	6	1	9	1
Colorado	5	2	6	4
Kansas	2	5	4	7
Iowa State	1	6	4	6
Missouri	1	6	4	6

South Division

	W	L	W	L
	Conf.		All	
Texas	6	1	9	2
Oklahoma	4	2	6	3
Texas Tech	4	3	5	5
Texas A&M	4	3	7	3
Oklahoma State	2	4	4	5
Baylor	0	7	1	9

Remaining Games

Nov. 20

Oklahoma State at Baylor
Oklahoma at Texas Tech
Missouri at Kansas State
Iowa State at Kansas

Nov. 26

Texas at Texas A&M
Nebraska at Colorado

Nov. 27

Oklahoma State at Oklahoma

Dec. 4

Big 12 Championship, San Antonio

BY THE NUMBERS

Kansas State vs. Nebraska
Nov. 13, 1999 • Lincoln, Neb.

Score By Quarters

Kansas State	0	9	0	6	—	15
Nebraska	16	8	0	17	—	41

Team Stats

	KSU	NU
First Downs	11	20
Rushing	6	16
Passing	5	4
Penalty	0	0
Rushing Attempts	37	61
Yards Gained Rushing	129	325
Yards Lost Rushing	37	18
Net Yards Rushing	92	309
Net Yards Passing	142	69
Passes Attempted	32	17
Passes Completed	8	8
Had Intercepted	1	0
Total Plays	69	78
Total Net Yards	234	378
Avg. Gain Per Play	3.4	4.8
Fumbles-Lost	4-4	10-3
Penalties-Yards	4-40	1-10
Punts-Yards	7-203	5-193
Avg. Per Punt	29.0	38.6
Punt Returns-Yards	0-0	6-42
Interceptions-Yards	0-0	1-0
Fumble Returns-Yards	0-0	2-41
Kickoff Returns-Yards	6-184	3-45
Possession Time	26:22	33:38

Scoring

NU — Eric Crouch 30-yard run (Josh Brown kick)
NU — Team safety
NU — Crouch 18-yard run (Brown kick)
KS — Jonathan Beasley 1-yard run (pass failed)
NU — Willie Miller 4-yard run (Frankie London run)
KS — Rheem 35-yard field goal
NU — Brown 30 yard field goal
NU — Dahrnan Diedrick 46 yard run (Brown kick)
KS — Adam Helm 1-yard run (run failed)
NU — Eric Johnson 15-yard fumble recovery (Brown kick)

Att. — 77,744

Temp. — 84

Individual Leaders

KANSAS STATE

RUSHING

Name	Att	Yds	YPC	LNG	TD
Murphy, F.	10	51	5.1	18	0
Allen, D.	9	18	2.0	4	0
Beasley, J.	4	12	3.0	11	1
Haf, J.	3	10	3.3	6	0
Helm, A.	11	1	0.1	16	1

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Beasley, J.	3-19-0	15.8	100	0
Helm, A.	4-12-1	33.3	46	0
Ronsick, M.	1-1-0	100.0	-4	0

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Morgan, Q.	3	116	38.7	55	0
Lockett, A.	2	17	8.5	9	0
Murphy, F.	1	13	13.0	13	0
Mayer, S.	1	0	0.0	0	0
Chapman, L.	1	-4	-4.0	0	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Ronsick, M.	5	191	38.2	48
Team	2	12	6.0	12

PUNT RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
None					

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Allen, D.	2	98	49.0	54	0
Williams, G.	2	35	17.5	22	0
Newman, T.	1	28	28.0	28	0
Chapman, L.	1	25	25.0	25	0

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Simoneau, M.	8	6	14	0	0	0
Chapman, L.	6	8	14	0	0	0
Cooper, J.	6	8	14	1-1	0	0
Holloman, C.	3	4	7	0	0	0
Fatafeh, M.	3	3	6	1-1	0	0
Johnson, C.	3	2	5	1-1	0	0
Howard, D.	4	0	4	1-3	0	1-3
Litton, T.	3	1	4	0	0	0
Proctor, M.	1	3	4	0	0	0
Butler, J.	3	0	3	0	0	0
Leber, B.	0	3	3	1-1	0	0
Carter, D.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Beisel, M.	1	1	2	1-3	0	0
Gosch, N.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Kazar, J.	1	0	1	0	0	0

NEBRASKA

RUSHING

Name	Att	Yds	YPC	LNG	TD
Crouch, E.	27	158	5.9	30	2
Diedrick, D.	14	93	6.6	46	1
Miller, W.	7	20	2.9	8	1
Applegate, S.	2	14	7.0	13	0
Buckhalter, C.	7	10	1.5	4	0
Alexander, D.	1	8	8.0	8	0
Perrino, J.	2	7	3.5	10	0
Hadenfeldt, D.	1	-1	1.0	0	0

PASSING

Name	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	8-17-0	47.1	69	0

RECEIVING

Name	No.	Yds.	YPC	LNG	TD
Wistrom, T.	4	68	17.0	28	0
Newcombe, B.	2	6	3.0	4	0
Diedrick, D.	1	3	3.0	9	0
Crouch, E.	1	-14	-14.0	0	0

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	5	193	38.6	58

PUNT RETURNS

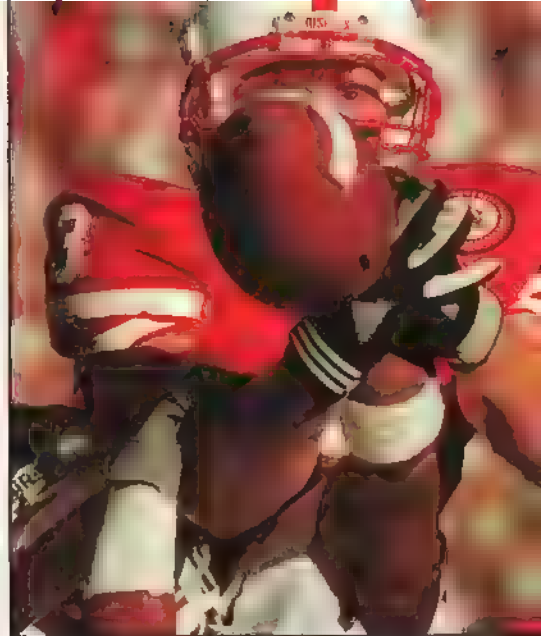
Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Newcombe, B.	4	44	11.0	28	0
Stella, R.	1	2	2.0	2	0
Walker, J.	1	4	-4.0	0	0

KICKOFF RETURNS

Name	No.	Yds.	YPR	LNG	TD
Walker, J.	1	23	23.0	23	0
Stella, R.	1	11	11.0	11	0
Brown, M.	1	11	11.0	11	0

DEFENSE

Name	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	Sacks
Polk, C.	4	4	8	1-8	0	1-8
Brown, M.	2	4	6	0	1-0	0
Vanden Bosch, K.	4	1	5	1-0	0	1-10
Shaw, B.	2	3	5	0	0	0
Lohr, J.	3	1	4	1-1	0	1-1
Siechta, J.	1	3	4	1-8	0	1-8
Jackson, J.	2	1	3	1-6	0	1-6
Booker, D.	2	1	3	0	0	0
Johnson, E.	1	2	3	1-1	0	0
Warren, S.	1	2	3	0	0	0
Whis, A.	2	0	2	1-3	0	0
Ortiz, T.	1	1	2	0	0	0
Craver, K.	0	2	2	0	0	0
Brown, R.	1	0	1	0	0	0
List, G.	1	0	1	1-4	0	0



Matt Davison has his eyes on the ball but can't make the catch, as KSU's Dyshod Carter defends.

1999 SEASON STATS

RUSHING

Name	G	Att	Yds.	YPG	TD
Crouch, E.	10	138	694	69.4	13
Alexander, D.	10	113	672	67.2	5
Buckhalter, C.	9	86	502	55.8	6
Diedrick, D.	10	54	307	30.7	2
Miller, W.	8	39	153	19.1	2
Newcombe, B.	10	35	84	8.4	3
Evans, D.	2	19	74	37.0	0
Perrino, J.	6	15	65	11.2	0
Uhlir, T.	9	10	29	3.2	0
Kingston, B.	8	6	19	2.4	0

PASSING

Name	G	C-A-I	Pct.	Yds.	TD
Crouch, E.	10	73-134-3	54.5	1,170	7
Newcombe, B.	10	11-18-1	61.1	246	2
Perrino, J.	6	0-1-0	00.0	0	0
Chrisman, J.	2	0-4-0	00.0	0	0

RECEIVING

Name	G	No.	Yds.	YPC	YPG	TD
Davison, M.	10	25	394	15.8	39.4	2
Newcombe, B.	10	16	228	14.3	22.8	3
Wistrom, T.	10	15	417	27.8	41.7	2
Applegate, S.	10	5	103	20.6	10.3	1
Alexander, D.	10	4	68	14.0	6.8	0
Go today, A.	9	3	53	17.7	5.9	0
Miller, W.	8	3	26	8.7	3.3	0
Buckhalter, C.	9	3	21	7.0	2.3	0
Crouch, E.	10	2	46	23.0	4.6	1
Gibson, J.	8	2	19	9.5	2.4	0
London, F.	9	2	11	5.5	1.2	0

FIELD GOALS

Name	G	Att.	Good	Long
Brown, J.	10	15	10	37

PUNTING

Name	No.	Yds.	Avg.	LNG
Hadenfeldt, D.	49	2,167	44.2	73

DEFENSE

Name	G	UT	AT	TT	FL	Int.	S/Yds.
Brown, M.	10	44	30	74	7-36	5-40	1-10
Polk, C.	10	29	41	70	10-52	0	5-53
Whis, A.	10	22	25	48	6-14	0	1-5
Craver, K.	10	28	13	41	2-3	3-18	0
Ortiz, T.	10	15	19	34	6-30	0	3-28
Warren, S.	10	15	17	32	11-67	0	6-61
Vanden Bosch, K.	9	18	12	30	8-44	0	3.5-38
Johnson, E.	7	11	19	30	7-25	0	4-20
Brown, R.	10	17	11	28	2-9	2-68	0
Jackson, J.	10	13	15	28	7-28	3-40	3-21

TEAM STATISTICS	NU	OPP
Total Offense-Yards	4,017	2,346
Plays	681	655
Average Per Play	5.9	3.6
Average Per Game	401.7	234.6
Net Rushing-Yards	2,801	754
Attempts	524	351
TDs Rushing	31	6
Net Passing-Yards	1,416	1,592
Completions	84	128
Average Per Pass	9.0	5.2
Average Per Catch	16.9	12.4
Average Per Game	141.6	159.2
TDs Passing	8	16
Sacks By-Yards	41-317	16-93
Fumbles-Lost	39-19	22-14
Penalties-Yards	55-519	85-509
Scoring		
1st	87	81
2nd	81	94
3rd	94	94
4th	0	0
TOT	356	356
Opponents	12	19
	27	58
	0	114

'Catch the Ball and Run'

Decline in yardage leads Huskers to adjust the way they return punts

By Mike Babcock

But seriously, folks... The key to his 86-yard punt return for a touchdown late in the third quarter of the Kansas game, Bobby Newcombe said, was "catching the ball and running with it."

He was joking, of course. It wasn't quite that simple.

He didn't even see the ball "until the last second."

Then "I caught the ball, got a bunch of great blocks, made one move here, another move there, and was able to utilize my speed and run down the sideline," Newcombe said.

Near the end of the run, he got a "great block" from Ralph Brown.

"It felt great, really," said Newcombe. "It felt great to actually have an opportunity to make a play, to get the ball and make a play for the team in a crucial situation."

Newcombe's touchdown gave Nebraska a 10-9 lead and, more importantly perhaps, provided the emotional impetus for a 24-17 victory against a surprisingly stubborn Kansas team.

Punt returns can do that for a team, which is why they are an integral part of the Cornhuskers' preparation each week. And the preparation has paid off. Through nine games this season, Nebraska had returned 47 punts for 555 yards. Last season, it returned 38 punts for 437 yards.

The average return yards have been about the same. But "ultimately, yardage is more important," said

Cornhusker assistant George Darlington, who works with the kick returners.

For example, Nebraska averaged 11.8 yards per return during the 1997 national championship season, compared to 11.5 yards last season. But the disparity in yardage was much greater. Nebraska had 601 punt return yards in 1997. "So we just felt our production went down," Darlington said.

Because of the decline in yardage, the Cornhuskers decided to adjust the way they return punts this season, dropping two players deep instead of three, as was the case a year ago.

That third player now helps pressure the punter.

As a result, sophomore Keyuo Craver isn't returning punts, even though he might be the team's best punt returner, according to Darlington — who even said that after the Kansas game.

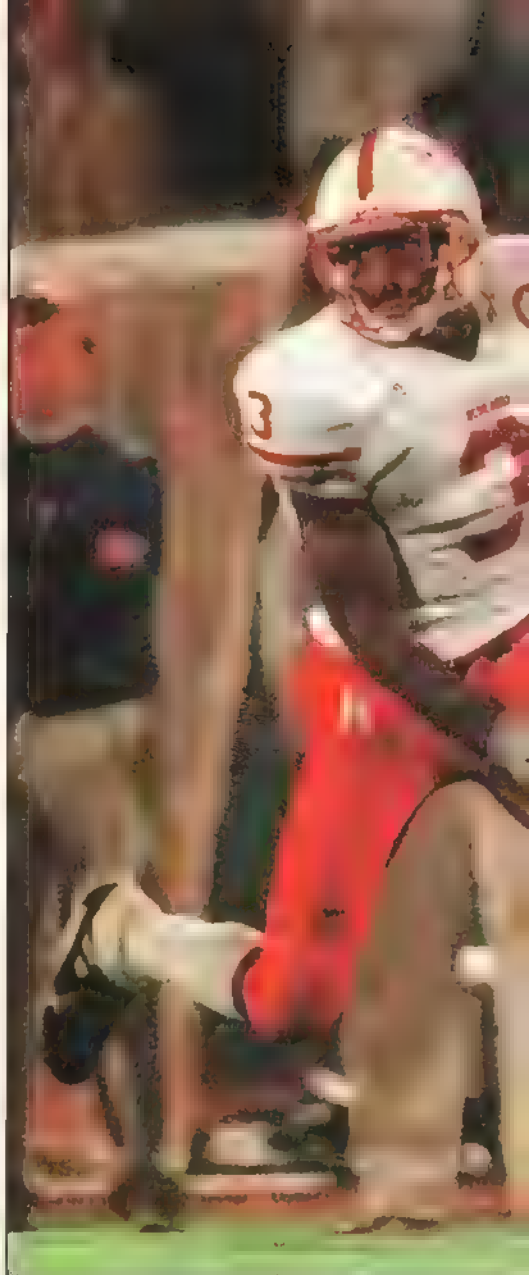
People "figured I was probably on dope," said Darlington.

"Keyuo, I think, has as much talent returning kicks as the other fellows. It's just that we need Keyuo somewhere else. We're just blessed to have some guys who can really do well."

"If we were three-back, most definitely Keyuo would be back there."

Craver's situation is similar to that of former Cornhusker Barron Miles, an all-conference cornerback in 1993 and 1994. Miles "was probably our best punt returner," Darlington said.

But he only returned punts during practice "because he was our best



Bobby Newcombe looks for running room, as Keyuo Craver (3) and Mike Brown (21) provide support on a punt return against Kansas.

'block-corner.' "

The block-corner's responsibility is self-explanatory.

"We had to make a decision," Darlington said of Miles. "We felt the value of his coming off the edge and blocking x number of punts, getting holding calls — where people just couldn't block him and grabbed a hold of him — and forcing the ball to be punted quickly was more of an asset."

Miles "was good about it, but his family wasn't too good about it," said Darlington. "Occasionally I'd see them before a game: 'Hey, when are you going to let Barron return a punt?'"

"It was like I was a bad guy, but from a team standpoint, he was more



valuable to the team, in our judgment, blocking kicks than he was returning them."

Miles set school records for blocked kicks in a game (3), a season (4) and a career (7).

Through the first nine games this season, Nebraska had blocked seven kicks, including one by Craver. Last season, the Cornhuskers blocked only one kick, a punt, by Ralph Brown.

That Nebraska wasn't likely to block a punt last season was dramatically illustrated in the Holiday Bowl game. Arizona "just (punted), boom, and took off," Darlington said.

"Then you have no punt return because you can't block all of them. Instead of two 'bullets' coming down to harass the return man, they had five or six guys because they just figured: 'Hey, Nebraska never tries to block. The guys coming off the edge aren't anything to write home about.'"

Nebraska returned three punts against the Wildcats, for a net of 3 yards.

Using Craver as a block-corner hasn't left the Cornhuskers devoid of punt returners, however. Newcombe and Joe Walker are the top two, as they were at the end of the 1997 season.

Both have excellent speed, an essential quality for a punt returner. But there's more to it than that.

"Number one, I like to have a guy who has the mental attitude that 'I'm going to score every time I touch the ball,'" said Darlington. "Sometimes you'll get an athlete who's satisfied to catch the ball and get what he can get. But you want a player like a David Allen (of Kansas State) or some of the guys we have who, when they catch the ball, they're going to try to score every time."

"Then, probably most people

would say, the ability to make somebody miss."

"Most coaches would go with the idea that occasionally the blocking won't be perfect . . . so that if you can make the first guy miss, you've got a chance to go all the way."

In addition, a good punt returner can't be bashful about going after the ball.

"We try to return every punt unless we're down close to the goal line," Darlington said.

"Again, that gets to be a little bit of attitude. We want the ball caught, and we want the 'bullets' blocked, to get the thing going. We go crazy if the ball hits and rolls."

Avoiding that requires planning. The returners have to be positioned deep enough to prevent punts from sailing over their heads, but not so deep that they have to run up too far.

"Sometimes it's hard to know,"

said Darlington.

The wind was a problem in the Texas game, for example. Nebraska's punt returners dropped back 30 yards, "which is extremely close to the other team," Darlington said. "But the ball still didn't go 30 yards (in the air), and we were catching balls on the bounce. We were back too deep.

"Sometimes it's hard to know. You can take an average of where the guy normally kicks and how he kicks into the wind, and then all of a sudden the adrenaline kicks in.

"You've got them at 35 yards, and the kid kicks the ball 60 yards."

In the 1994 Kickoff Classic against West Virginia, "I think we had our punt return at 60 yards, and the kid kicked it over our heads," said Darlington. "And it was still on the rise."

West Virginia's Todd Sauerbrun averaged 60.9 yards on nine punts in that game.

In any case, it's not easy, even though Newcombe and Walker can make it appear that way. And so could Craver.

"We would rotate if we had the corners we could like," Darlington said.

That's definitely no joke ■

Rodgers Holds Most Records

Johnny Rodgers followed proper procedure in returning punts his first season at Nebraska. After that, however, he was on his own. Cornhusker assistant Cletus Fischer, who worked with the kicking teams, "gave me the green light to do whatever I wanted to do," Rodgers has recalled.

"We were pretty dominant on those special teams. I was able to keep us in good field position all the time. Not only could we run 'em back, we always had good field position."

Rodgers returned 98 punts during his three seasons, from 1970 to 1972, and averaged a school-record 15.46 yards per return. He holds nearly every Cornhusker punt return record, as well as the NCAA Division IA record for punt returns for touchdowns during a career.

He returned seven punts for touchdowns, plus one against Alabama in the 1973 Orange Bowl game. Three of his punt-return touchdowns came in the 1971 national championship season.

Without Rodgers' kick returns — he also ranks third all-time at Nebraska in kickoff returns — the Cornhuskers probably wouldn't have gone 13-0 in 1971, former coach Tom Osborne has said.

Rodgers' 1,515 career punt return yards are nearly twice those (817) of Tyrone Hughes, who is second on Nebraska's career list. (Hughes is No. 1 in career kickoff return yards.)

Rodgers' philosophy of returning punts

became free-form after his sophomore season.

"When the ball bounces, the first thing a coach tells you is to get away from it," he has said. "But I'd try my best to figure out how I was going to get the ball. If you don't follow the program, there's not a script. I wasn't into that visualization stuff. I could imagine I was going to score. But how?"

Rodgers wasn't hesitant to take off on his own. "When you run away from your blockers, that's taking a chance," he has said. "But we had it down pretty good. A lot of times, they'd hit me before I got it. Like in the Oklahoma game (in 1971), I probably should have made a fair catch."

Had Rodgers made a fair catch the first time he fielded a punt in the "Game of the Century," the history of Cornhusker football might have been dramatically altered.

His 72-yard punt return for a touchdown is the most famous in school history, setting the tone for No. 1-ranked Nebraska's 35-31 victory against the No. 2-ranked Sooners at Norman, Okla.

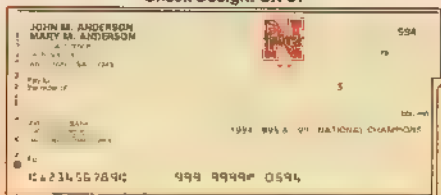
Nebraska's leaders in career punt return yards (through Texas A&M game):

1. Johnny Rodgers (1970-72)	1,515
2. Tyrone Hughes (1989-92)	817
3. Larry Wachholtz (1964-66)	788
4. Dana Brinson (1985-88)	767
5. Irving Fryar (1981-83)	708
6. Jeff Smith (1981-84)	665
7. Pat Fischer (1958-60)	550
8. Shevin Wiggins (1996-98)	539
9. Mike Fullman (1995-96)	535
10. Joe Walker (1997)	514

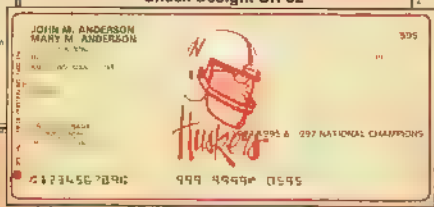
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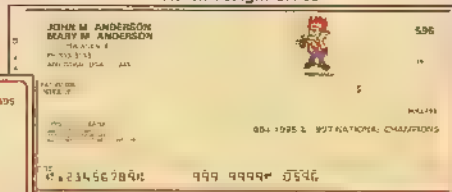
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Defense Johnson's Family

**Senior linebacker
proud of performance
by partner Jackson**

By Steven M. Sipple

Something interesting transpired earlier this season while Nebraska's Eric Johnson sat out three games with a sprained left knee

His partner at weakside linebacker, fellow senior Julius Jackson, became the poster boy for the Huskers' big-play defense.

Johnson loved it, and he doesn't just tell you that to sound good. Search all you want for a trace of jealousy in Johnson, but good luck finding it inside one of Nebraska's most selfless, team-oriented players.

"You know, the way Julius played sparked a fire inside me and made me proud," said Johnson, emphasizing his pride by pounding his heart with a clinched fist. "That's my brother. We're linebackers. All the linebackers stick together. We're the closest linebacking crew in the nation."

"Everything happens for a reason. I got hurt, and now the coaches and the rest of the world recognize Julius. I'm proud of him."

That's Johnson. Seemingly always upbeat. His attitude is as positive as he is fast (he runs a 4.43-second 40-yard dash).

The 6-foot-1, 205-pound native of Phoenix, Ariz., suffered a sprained medial collateral ligament in his knee during the first half of the Sept. 18 win against Southern Mississippi. He had gotten off to a strong start this season, recording 10 tackles in the first nine quarters. Three of his stops were for losses, including a pair of sacks.

Jackson, though, made an immediate impact in Johnson's absence, returning a fumble and an interception for Nebraska's only touchdowns against Southern Miss. In the next game, at Missouri, with Johnson laid up in Lincoln, Jackson picked off another pass and recovered another fumble, both of which led to TDs.

The college football world took notice. CNSI.com placed Jackson on its midseason All-America team, and last week he was named one of 15 semifinalists for the Football News



Eric Johnson had seven tackles in Nebraska's 37-0 victory over Texas A&M.

defensive player of the year award. This despite the fact Johnson and Jackson alternate at their position, with Johnson starting.

Johnson enjoyed a strong return from his injury, recording 15 tackles (eight solo) in three games — a loss to Texas and wins against Kansas and Texas A&M. Against the Aggies, on Nov. 6, Johnson made seven stops, including one of the Huskers' eight sacks.

Johnson says he and Jackson are basically equal in ability

"Julius is a better blitzer in the middle, and I'm a better blitzer on the outside," Johnson said. "Together we make a complete package."

Johnson, of course, relies heavily on his speed to chase down ballcarriers. Speed is the strength of his game.

Off the field he draws strength from his late mother, Freeda Johnson, who died of breast cancer in January 1996.

Johnson's first couple of years in Lincoln were trying. His failure to meet minimum college-entrance exam scores sidelined him as a Proposition 48 casualty in 1995. Even though he was free to concentrate on his studies,

he said, his grades were "going downhill."

His mother's death occurred only months after he enrolled at NU. Johnson missed her cooking, her phone calls. One day, though, it hit him: He could deal with her death if he relied on his faith.

"I decided (her death) was more of a celebration, because she's with God," he said. "She did everything she could for people. Everybody loved her. But the pain never leaves you; you just learn to deal with it."

Johnson stressed the role the team played in helping him cope. His coaches and teammates, he says, are his family. He means it. He goes to war with his family on Saturdays, and for the most part, the family known as the Black Shirts has dominated.

Johnson cherishes every play. He did before his injury earlier this season, but the feeling is even more pronounced now, as the Huskers enter the stretch run.

"You can't take a play off," he said. "You see a lot of teams taking plays off. We strive to not take any off. That's the whole Black Shirt theme." ■

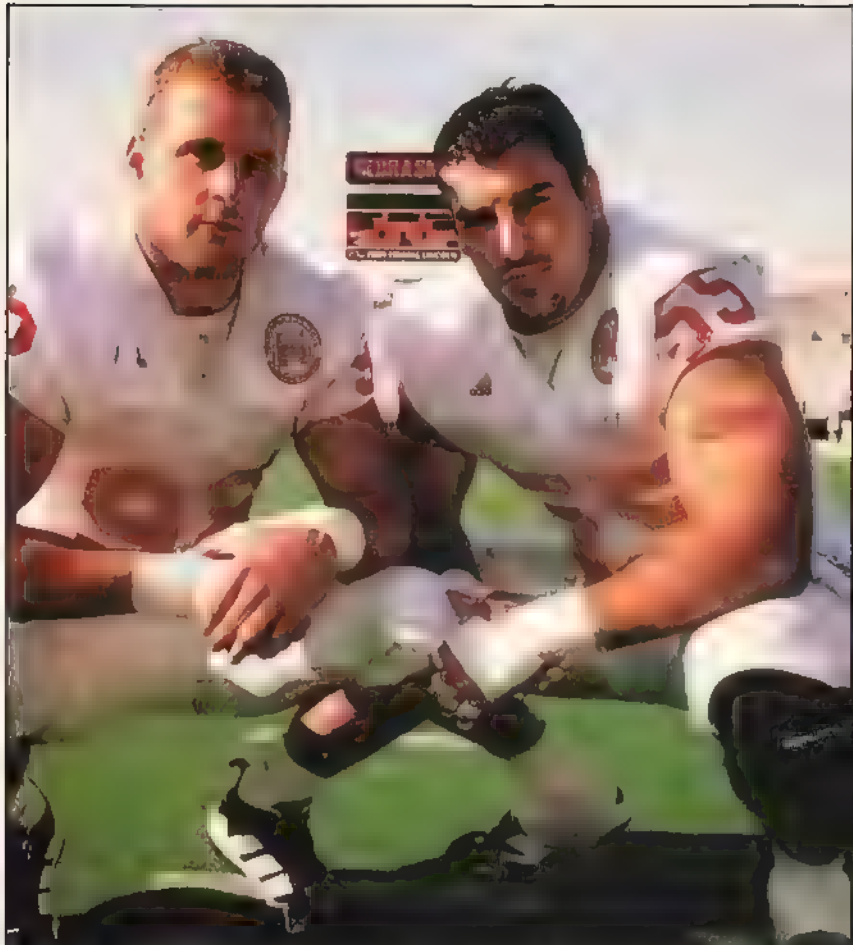
Huskers Illustrated Team of the Decade, 1990-99

Offense

TE	Johnny Mitchell (1990-91)
SE	Jon Bostick (1989-90-91)
Line	Zach Wiegert (1991-92-93-94)
Line	Aaron Taylor (1994-95-96-97)
Line	Will Shields (1989-90-91-92)
Line	Brenden Stai (1991-92-93-94)
Line	Aaron Graham (1992-93-94-95)
QB	Tommie Frazier (1992-93-94-95)
IB	Ahman Green (1995-96-97)
FB	Joel Makovicka (1995-96-97-98)
WB	Abdul Muhammad (1991-92-93-94)
Kicker	Kris Brown (1995-96-97-98)

Defense

Rush end	Jared Tomich (1994-95-96)
Rush end	Grant Wistrom (1994-95-96-97)
Tackle	Jason Peter (1994-95-96-97)
Tackle	Christian Peter (1993-94-95)
LB	Ed Stewart (1991-92-93-94)
LB	Trev Alberts (1990-91-92-93)
LB	Travis Hill (1989-90-91-92)
Back	Ralph Brown (1996-97-98-current)
Back	Mike Minter (1993-94-95-96)
Back	Mike Brown (1996-97-98-current)
Back	Barron Miles (1992-93-94)
Punter	Mike Stigge (1989-90-91-92)



Friends and roommates Grant Wistrom (left) and Jason Peter were characterized as the heart and soul of the 1997 national championship team. Both were All-Americans and first-round draft choices.

Friends Wistrom, Peter 'Ramrodded' '97 Team

*Roommates put
Huskers 'over the
hump' with athletic
ability, leadership*

By Mike Babcock

Jason Peter declined interview requests following Nebraska's 27-24 victory at Colorado in 1997. The senior defensive tackle went directly to the team bus from the locker room.

Such silence was untypical. Peter was among the most gregarious Cornhuskers.

He also was a co-captain for what turned out to be Coach Tom Osborne's final team, a position that carried with it the responsibility of

TEAMS OF THE DECADE

Tenth
in a series
(1990-99)

speaking on behalf of the team.

Peter was aware of his responsibility and apologized to reporters the next week.

"I had nothing against you guys," he said. "I just needed to get on the bus. I had to sit down and

get comfortable. It was the back. It hurt to stand up."

If it hurt to stand up, you can imagine what it must have felt like playing football. But Peter had refused to let severe back spasms keep him on the sideline that afternoon.

Late in the first quarter, defensive coordinator Charlie McBride called his name. Peter thought McBride was going to tell him not to go back into the game because of the pain.

"I'm not coming out of this damn game," Peter said, much to McBride's surprise.

"It's probably the only time I've ever yelled at Coach McBride," Peter said later. "He started laughing because he was in such shock that I was actually yelling at him, I think.

"I was laughing about it, too.

'What am I thinking? This guy controls how much I play.' "

McBride wasn't planning to take Peter out of the game. He was going to tell Peter that linebackers coach Craig Bohl wanted to talk to him about what Colorado was doing offensively.

Peter seemed to have a high tolerance for pain. He played the final six games of his junior season wearing a cast because of a broken hand. And even though the back spasms intensified, he tried to play against Texas A&M in the Big 12 playoff the week after the Colorado game in 1997.

Midway through the second quarter, he came out of the game and watched the second half in street clothes. "If he can possibly play, he'll play," Osborne said. "He's a guy who will lay it on the line for you, and I think everybody knows that. Everybody appreciates that very much."

Peter was one-half of Nebraska's dynamic defensive duo in 1997. The other half, of course, was his friend and roommate Grant Wistrom, a rush end and the Lombardi Award winner.

The two often were characterized as the heart and soul of the 1997 team. And through force of will, they led the Cornhuskers to the coaches' version of the national championship.

"Those two guys, among some others, ramrodded that football team," Osborne said at a news conference on the morning after Nebraska's 42-17 Orange Bowl game victory against Tennessee. "They decided a year ago they were going to come back and get the thing done."

"Their leadership was invaluable."

Without Peter and Wistrom, the Cornhuskers almost certainly wouldn't have gone undefeated and shared the national championship with Michigan. No one would have disputed that.

And if they hadn't been committed to winning a national championship, they probably wouldn't have returned for their senior season. Both could have declared for the NFL draft after the 1996 season. And both would have been high-round picks. Wistrom was projected as a first-rounder, in fact.

But both were stung by a 37-27 upset loss to Texas in the first Big 12 championship game in 1996. And both vowed to return and fin-

ish the job of winning a national title.

"Our battle cry throughout the summer workouts was that we always had a big chip on our shoulders with what happened in St. Louis," Wistrom said of the Texas loss after the Cornhuskers routed Texas A&M 54-15 in the 1997 Big 12 playoff. "It was what I focused on in the heat of the summer."

One afternoon in the summer of 1997, during conditioning drills at Memorial Stadium, Osborne saw Peter sprint across the field and tackle an unsuspecting teammate.

"Even though I didn't approve of what Jason did, I couldn't argue with his level of commitment,"

Osborne wrote in his book *Faith in the Game*. "Jason and his teammates were on a mission."

Many others contributed significantly to the successful completion of that mission.

But "the fact that Jason Peter and Grant Wistrom came back, I think, probably put us over the hump, if not with their athletic skills, their leadership," Osborne said after the Orange Bowl.

Their athletic skills were as important as their leadership to the national championship run.

Peter was a consensus All-American and a finalist for the Outland Trophy, won by teammate Aaron Taylor, and the Bronko

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Nagurski Award as the defensive player of the year.

McBride said he was among the best defensive tackles ever to play at Nebraska.

Wistrom was a two-time All-American and a two-time Academic All-American, something only one other Cornhusker has ever accomplished — Dave Rimington did it in 1981-82.

He holds school records for career tackles-for-loss with 58.5, and he's second on Nebraska's all-time list in quarterback sacks with 26.5. Trev Alberts, another member of the Huskers Illustrated team of the 1990s, is the sack leader, with 29.5. He's second to Wistrom in career tackles-for-loss (45).

Wistrom played without redshirting. He had an immediate impact. "I've been around and seen a lot of good ones," said McBride. "And I'll guarantee you, Grant is one of the best."

His performance in the Oklahoma game in 1997 illustrates McBride's point. Wistrom was credited with 10 tackles, including nine unassisted and two sacks for 10

Nov. 23 Men vs. Eastern Illinois

7:05 p.m.

yards in losses, and forced three fumbles, one of which he recovered, in the 69-7 victory against the Sooners.

The victory was No. 250 for Osborne, who had yet to announce he would be stepping aside after the season. "Nobody wanted to be the person who let Coach Osborne down," Wistrom said afterward.

"We're just the tip of the iceberg here, this 1997 team. There have been 24 before us and there are probably going to be a few more after us. We're not the only ones who played a part."

None were any tougher than Peter, however, who explained after the Colorado game why he was adamant about continuing to play despite the back spasms: "It's Nebraska-Colorado."

"My back was tight; I knew that," he said. "Between plays, I'm thinking: 'God, I'm in a lot of pain.' But I'm not thinking about that when I'm trying to rush the passer."

He was, however, thinking about it when he headed for the bus ■



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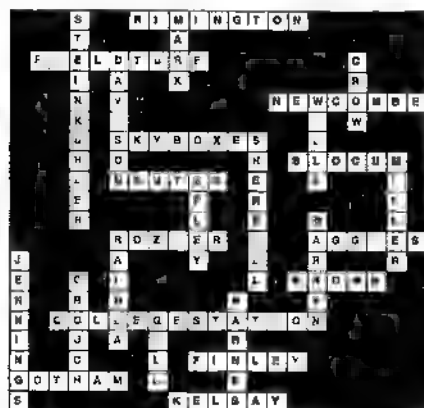
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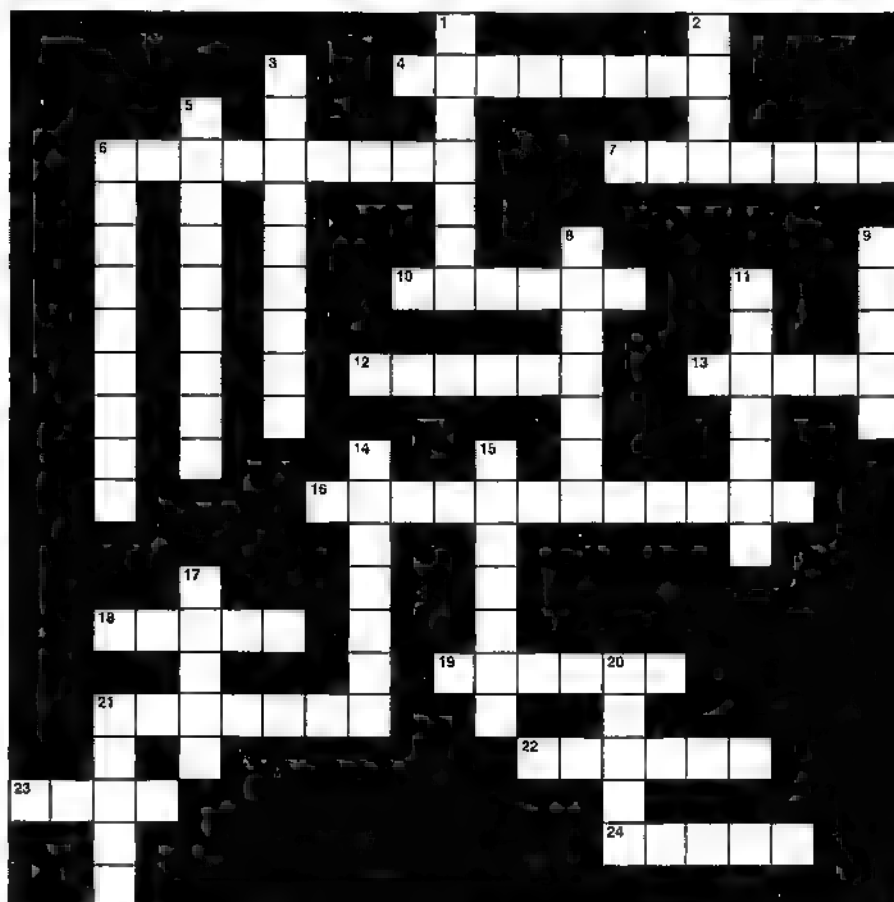
ACROSS

- 4 1990 AP national champion
- 6 Former Colorado coach
- 7 Colorado mascot
- 10 NU's leading scorer
- 12 NU's No. 18
- 13 NU receivers coach
- 16 NU's 2000 opener
- 18 NU's No. 81
- 19 NU's No. 99
- 21 NU's No. 27
- 22 1994 Heisman winner from CU
- 23 NU quarterback coach
- 24 NU special teams coach

DOWN

- 1 University of Colorado location
- 2 NU linebackers coach
- 3 NU's leading rusher
- 5 Colorado nickname
- 6 NU's 2000 road opener
- 8 NU assistant, graduate of Colorado
- 9 NU athletic director

CROSSWORD



- 11 Colorado coach
- 14 NU's leading receiver
- 15 NU's 1998 bowl
- 17 Colorado's 1998 bowl

- 20 NU strength coach
- 21 NU's No. 69

Answers in Nov. 26 issue

This Week in Husker History

November 21

1981 — Senior Mark Mauer gets the start at quarterback with sophomore Turner Gill sidelined by an injury to his lower right leg and directs Nebraska to a 37-14 victory against Oklahoma at Norman. Mauer, who began the season as the starter, completes 11-of-16 passes for 148 yards and one touchdown. The Cornhuskers gain 482 yards, including 314 rushing, led by Roger Craig and Mike Rozier.

November 22

1969 — Jeff Kinney rushes for 127 yards and three touchdowns and passes to Guy Ingles for another as Nebraska defeats Oklahoma at Norman, 44-14. The Blackshirts stifle Oklahoma's running game, limiting Heisman Trophy winner Steve Owens to 71 yards rushing. Owens also doesn't score a touchdown for the first time in 17 games. With the victory, Nebraska ties Missouri for the Big Eight title.

November 23

1963 — On the day after President John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Nebraska defeats Oklahoma 29-20 at

Memorial Stadium to win the Big Eight Conference championship and earn an Orange Bowl bid. University officials meet for six hours, consulting with the conference and the NCAA over whether to play the game. The Cornhuskers hold a 29-7 lead with two minutes remaining, but Oklahoma converts a pair of fumbles into touchdowns to give Nebraska fans some uneasy moments.

November 24

1995 — Nebraska depends on defense and kicking to take control in a 37-0 victory against Oklahoma at Memorial Stadium. Jamel Williams scores the first touchdown on a 36-yard interception return. Tony Veland scores the second on a 57-yard fumble return. And Kris Brown kicks three field goals as the Cornhuskers complete their third consecutive undefeated regular season.

November 25

1971 — Jerry Tagge directs a 12-play, 74-yard touchdown drive to give the No. 1-ranked Cornhuskers a 35-31 victory against No. 2 Oklahoma at Norman in the "Game of

the Century." Jeff Kinney, who rushes for 171 yards, scores the winning touchdown, his fourth of the game, from 2 yards out. Rich Glover and Larry Jacobson, the Outland Trophy winner, lead the Nebraska Blackshirts. Glover is involved in 22 tackles, playing against All-American center Tom Brahaney.

November 26

1983 — Cornerback Neil Harris knocks down a Danny Bradley pass intended for Buster Rhymes in the end zone with 32 seconds remaining to preserve Nebraska's 28-21 victory against Oklahoma at Norman. Fullback Mark Schellen scores the Cornhuskers' first and last touchdowns, and I-back Mike Rozier rushes for 205 yards on 35 carries in Nebraska's 22nd consecutive victory.

November 27

1990 — Nebraska defeats the Omaha YMCA at Omaha 10-0 in the first football game in school history. Dr. Langdon Frothingham, a faculty member and Harvard graduate, prepares the team for the game. ■



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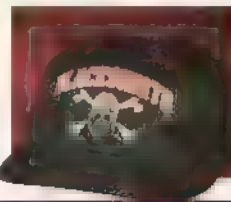
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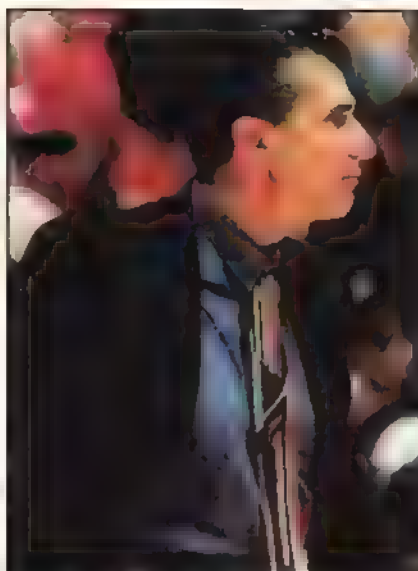
Huskers recover from slow start, rally for win in exhibition opener

It was good as exhibitions go. And it kept the fans in their seats.

Few in the Devaney Sports Center crowd of 5,630 left before it was over.

"If I drew it up, I couldn't ask for a more perfect scenario: a tough, physical game where we got beat up and humbled in the first half, then found a way to come back," Nebraska men's basketball coach Danny Nee said after his team's 107-99 overtime victory against the California South All-Stars.

Point guard Danny Walker, a transfer from Compton, Calif., Community College, hit a three-point shot at the buzzer to tie the game at 89 and force the overtime. Nebraska had trailed by as many as 20 points in the second half and was still behind by 10 with 4:24 remaining.



Danny Nee liked the way his team found a way to come back.

"I'd rather play a game like this than play a game where it's a 30- or 40-point blowout," said Nee.

For a little over a half, it appeared

the Cornhuskers might get blown out by 30 or 40 points, by a team of former college players sponsored by Double-Pump, Inc.

The All-Stars came to Lincoln with a 2-2 record, losing to Kentucky (73-66) and Clemson (81-60) and then defeating Vanderbilt (86-79) and Georgia Tech (95-85).

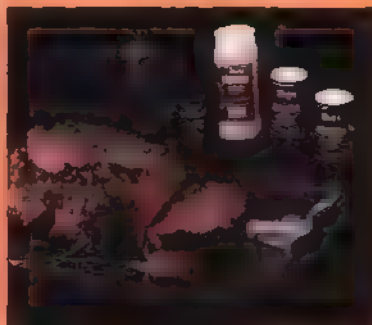
The Georgia Tech exhibition was played the previous night in Atlanta, Ga.

The way the Cornhuskers played during the first half it looked as if "we had the trip from Atlanta and got off the plane and didn't go to bed," said Nee. "I think we were going at a practice level, and they were going at what we call a game-pace level the first 10 minutes of the game."

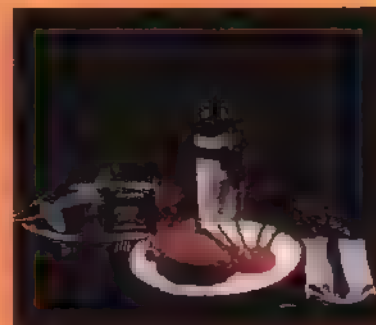
"It took us 10 or 12 minutes to adjust. It looked like we were in slow motion."

The Cornhuskers now have won 22 consecutive exhibitions dating to 1988. Regardless of the outcome, the exhibition provided a first look at

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Nebraska's nationally ranked recruiting class: Walker, Steffon Bradford, Kimani Ffriend and Kenny Booker.

Brian Conklin, the fifth member of the class, is slated for a redshirt and didn't play.

Walker, Bradford and Ffriend, all junior college transfers, were impressive

Walker scored 19 points and was credited with four assists, with only two turnovers.

Bradford scored 16 points and pulled down 16 rebounds.

And Ffriend, the successor to Big 12 "Player of the Year" Venson Hamilton, totaled 19 points, 14 rebounds and four blocked shots before fouling out in the overtime

Booker, a freshman, played 12 minutes in spot duty

"I think there's just a big learning curve for them," Nee said.

The three junior college transfers joined senior Larry Florence, a returning starter, and junior Rodney Fields, a junior college transfer who sat out last season as a medical redshirt, in the starting lineup.

Fields replaced senior Cookie Belcher at the off-guard position.

Belcher didn't suit up for the exhibition because he was suffering from the flu. His availability for this season remains in doubt as he continues to recover from wrist surgery.

"It's going to be a slow process for us because it's a totally new team," said Florence, who scored 20 points before fouling out with 23 seconds remaining in regulation. "Once everybody gets onto the scheme of things and how we want to play defense, just get some team chemistry, we'll be all right."

He cautioned against making too much of the first of two exhibitions.

"That victory doesn't mean anything," he said. "It's just like us scrimmaging."

Even so, the team needed to play well, according to Walker. "We didn't want to come out, a new recruiting class, guys making statements in the paper, saying how good we're going to be . . . we didn't want to come out and let down the crowd the first game," he said.

"So we knew we had to keep fighting. There's still a lot we have to learn as a team, still a lot of wrinkles we have to smooth out. But besides that, it was a great win for us.

"We united. We became a team. You could see it out there on guys' faces."

Nee couldn't have asked for any more than that. ■

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Huskers Get Set in Roles

*McWilliams shows
unselfishness
in adjusting to
new offense*

By Todd Henrichs

Like a quarterback in football, most experts will say to have a championship volleyball team, you must have a good setter.

Coach Terry Pettit believes Nebraska has two.

Junior Jill McWilliams and freshman Lindsay Wischmeier share setting duties in the Huskers' 6-2 offense. Together, they've helped to mold the team into a conference title contender after an unsettling 2-2 Big 12 start.

"From a consistency standpoint, both of them are setting as well as first-year setters have in the past," Pettit said. "They're setting as high or a higher percentage of hittable balls now than say a Christy Johnson her first year or a Fiona (Nepo) her first year. The fact that they're not out there six rotations just means that their role is slightly different."

That's been the only surprise for McWilliams, who came into this season expecting to fill the shoes of Nepo and hopefully emerge as Nebraska's next All-American setter.

But three days before the season opener, Nebraska coaches surprised nearly everyone by switching from the traditional 5-1 (one-setter) offense to the more complicated 6-2.

The new offense allows NU to always have three attackers along the front row. For McWilliams, the



Junior Jill McWilliams shares setting duties with freshman Lindsay Wischmeier.

tradeoff is spending three of the six rotations on the bench.

Nebraska's captain, McWilliams said sitting out — even for a few rotations — wasn't easy to accept at first.

"It was kind of weird coming off the bench cold," said McWilliams, a native of Des Moines, Iowa. "You felt like you would just get into the flow of the game, and then you'd come out

"But it's all about being able to realize what your role is and do that to the best of your ability. I know I can give just as much to the team when I'm on the bench as far as leadership goes."

Such unselfishness isn't rare on Nebraska's team this season. The 6-2 offense cut dramatically into the playing time of senior Nikki Henk, who had played in every match of her NU career before this season.

Tonia Tauke, another senior, lost her starting spot at midseason, and Katie Jahnke and Kim Behrends have seen their playing time cut back as well.

On the other hand, Wischmeier is one of three freshmen playing regularly for the Huskers. The switch to the 6-2 was specifically designed to allow more playing time for freshman Greichaly Cepero.

Pettit said Nebraska couldn't be where it is now without McWilliams and others accepting their new roles. However, he stresses the importance of getting contributions from every player in practice daily.

"They may have five games to impact a match. They may have one play," Pettit said. "It's all opportunity."

The unselfishness has paid dividends for the Huskers, who climbed back atop the Big 12 by winning nine of 10 matches. Included were victories over Kansas State and Texas A&M which avenged losses from earlier this season.

Nebraska played some of its best ball offensively during the stretch, something McWilliams says is the result of Huskers finally growing into their new roles.

"At the beginning of the year, we had a lot of new faces on the court," said McWilliams, who had only one career start before this season. "We're clicking as a team now because we've played together for a long time."

Pettit says Nebraska is benefiting from some of its best balance offensively. Junior All-American Nancy Meendering has remained dominant statistically, but others have joined in. Combined, Nebraska's other five attacking players are averaging better than 10 kills a game.

Some of the credit must go to NU's setters, who Pettit says are playing with more confidence and better consistency.

"It's worked out as well as I thought it could at this point," Pettit

said. "Something that was a disadvantage early in the season has become a strength."

That's the same way McWilliams looks at it. Coming out of the game gives her a chance to evaluate things and hear suggestions from her coaches.

The same happens in practice when McWilliams and Wischmeier can offer words of advice for each other.

"When she's setting, I'll be standing on the sideline, and I can give her feedback," McWilliams said, "and she'll do the same thing when I'm setting. That helps a lot to hear it from teammates when maybe the coaches are concentrating on what the hitters are doing at that time. Then we have kind of our own little coach in the other setter."

Which is precisely what Pettit expects from his rotating quarterbacks.

"Leadership is mostly about taking care of yourself and being responsible for the things you do," Pettit said. "The fact that they're playing well, that they're serving well and that they're making the right decisions in play-calling, that's leadership." ■

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Speed Priority in NU's Search for Defenders

Undersized players fill different roles in Nebraska defense

By James Hale

Speed has always been a major factor in sports, but never more so than today. A talented athlete who is fast is almost always better than a talented athlete who is slow. In fact, a talented athlete who is undersized, but fast, still can find his way onto the Nebraska football team.

We can go as far as to say that a player who is too big or undersized at one position may be just what the Cornhuskers are looking for at another spot. Nebraska is known for taking large safety types and turning them into linebackers or taking large linebackers and turning them into rush ends.

Speed is always the dominating factor. The Huskers want defenders who can run or with enough quickness that they are always in the middle of the play. In fact, their size out of high school really doesn't matter, as long as the player has the

potential to grow and won't lose his speed.

The ability to evaluate a prep athlete at another position is a tremendous plus for the Nebraska coaches.

Lannie Hopkins (6-foot-2, 185 pounds with 4.4 speed in the 40-yard dash) of Rowlett, Texas, is a perfect example. Hopkins is the size of a safety or maybe even a large cornerback, but he mostly plays linebacker on the prep level, and that is where Nebraska wants him as well.

If Hopkins weren't from such a small town in Texas, he probably would be known as one of the best linebackers in the country. Hopkins' speed and quickness make it difficult for high school offenses to account for him.

Through nine games this season Hopkins has 140 tackles, 12 sacks, six caused fumbles, one interception and nine fumble recoveries, plus he is a dynamite player on special teams. Hopkins doesn't play on offense only because his coach fears they are going to wear him out.

"Believe me if I thought it would be OK for the young man, I



Jake Andersen of Denver (Mullen) is one of five offensive linemen who have given commitments to play for Nebraska.

would have him at tailback or somewhere I could get the football in his hands because I am sure that he would do something special with it," Rowlett Coach Tommy Watkins said. "When you have an athlete like Lannie, you have a tendency to want to keep on the field at all times. With Lannie, we decided that he was such a great player for us at linebacker and on special teams that he would help us win more games just by playing defense than going both ways.

"Lannie plays linebacker for us but would be great in the secondary too," Watkins said. "He has the frame that he could put on 30 pounds and still be very fast and quick for his size. Everybody that I know is recruiting him at linebacker, including Nebraska. However, I wouldn't hesitate at all to put him in the secondary because he is good enough to get the job done.

Nebraska Commitments for 2000

Player	Hometown (school)	Ht.	Wt.	Pos.
Jake Andersen	Denver (Mullen)	6-2	305	OL
Thunder Collins	Los Angeles (East L.A. College)	6-2	210	IB
Ira Cooper	Omaha (Westside), Neb.	6-1 1/2	220	LB
Sandro DeAngelis	Buffalo, N.Y. (St. Joseph Coll.)	5-9	195	FB/K
Mike Erickson	Papillion (Papillion-LaVista), Neb.	6-4	260	OL
Martin Flaum	Denver (Northglenn), Colo.	6-5	280	OL
Steve Kriewald	North Loup-Scotia	5-11	250	FB
DeWayne Long Jr.	West Des Moines (Dowling) Iowa	6-1	205	RB
Lornell McPherson	Omaha (Central), Neb.	5-11	175	DB/WB
Ross Pilkington	Loveland, Colo.	6-1	175	WR
Josh Plisch	Rothschild, Wis.	6-4	290	OL
Nick Povendo	Keller, Texas	6-5	285	OG
Jason Richenberger	Liberty, Mo.	6-3	210	LB
Chris Septak	Millard (West), Neb.	6-4	235	TE

Hopkins said he is keeping an open mind about recruiting and wants to give all five schools that he visits an even shot. Texas A&M gets first shot at him followed by Memphis, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Missouri.

Nebraska is in the market for pure cover cornerbacks, as one starter is graduating and all but one of the cornerbacks are upperclassmen.

Rashowan Dukes (5-10, 165, 4.4) of Wilmington (Banning), Calif., is a pure cover corner who is exciting to watch. Dukes is one of the top players on one of the top prep teams in the country and has played a major role in Banning going 9-1 during the regular season.

Dukes has a number of schools recruiting him, including his early favorite Texas A&M, followed by Colorado State, Washington, Idaho, San Jose State, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Tennessee.

"I like Nebraska a lot and would really like to take a look at their program," Dukes said. "Texas A&M is showing me the most interest right now, but I know how good the Nebraska program is and know what it stands for. I would like to visit them sometime after my season."

Richard Johnson (6-0, 170, 4.39) of Randallstown, Md., has emerged on the prep scene after a banner senior season. Johnson has picked off seven passes and has Virginia Tech as his early leader. Nebraska is right in the hunt along with Michigan, Syracuse and Purdue. Johnson recently turned down a scholarship offer from Penn State.

Bo Mosley (5-10, 160, 4.5) of Osceola, Ark., is a preseason All-American who is a dominant performer on both sides of the ball. Despite sharing the spotlight with Harold James, Mosley managed to rush for 1,576 yards and 26 touchdowns a year ago. Mosley is also a pure cornerback on defense and sparkles shutting down the opponents' best receiver.

"Bo could be a great player on either side of the ball, but because of his size and the way he handles himself on defense, most colleges like him as a pure cover corner," Osceola Coach Clinton Gore said. "Athletically, he can do whatever the wide receiver is doing. If he tries to outrun him, Bo easily stays with him. If he cuts, then Bo cuts. He is good enough that he becomes the wide receiver's shadow."

Texas Quarterback Considers Huskers

Way back in the summer when it appeared there wasn't a dynamite run/pass option quarterback on the prep market it became apparent that Nebraska was going to take a wait and see attitude towards what signal callers they would offer. The Cornhuskers are not in a situation where they need in an immediate starter, but they do need more quality quarterbacks in their program.

However, Nebraska has never been a program that would just offer an athlete only to fill a position. They will still look for the very best player that they like.

Enter Carlyle Holiday (6-4, 190, 4.5) of San Antonio (Roosevelt), Texas, who is the best combination run/pass quarterback in Texas. Holiday is blessed with a strong arm, but has great speed in the 40-yard dash. He doesn't run the option per se in high school, but has the athletic ability to be good at it. Nebraska has expanded its offense to the point that its quarterbacks must now be able to do both, because the Cornhuskers are going to throw the ball at least 20 times a game.

Holiday says he has visits set with Notre Dame, Syracuse and Texas A&M and that he will visit Nebraska in January.

Nebraska was planning to bring in a large group of prep athletes on official visits for its home contest with Kansas State. The game should settle the Big 12 Conference North Division Championship, and the Huskers wanted to take advantage of such an atmosphere.

Sandro DeAngelis of Buffalo, N.Y., has already committed to the Huskers was to visit. DeAngelis is a fullback/place-kicker who has been hampered by an ankle sprain all season.

Linebacker Charlie Cosgrove (6-3, 240, 4.6) of Minneapolis, Minn., said he is going to take his five visits to BYU, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas State and Michigan State.

Middle linebacker Aurmon Satchell (6-2, 205, 4.5) of Denver (Jefferson) is still drawing all kinds of attention. Satchell is having a great senior season with 98 tackles, two interceptions (one return for a touchdown) and one fumble recovery. Satchell said he would visit Texas with Jefferson star running back Marcus Houston. Satchell said he is working to set visits with USC, Nebraska and Iowa.

Oklahoma has run its commitment list up to nine, with two outstanding linebacker prospects. Charles Dupree (6-3, 210, 4.6) of Oklahoma City (Millwood) is a top-five player in Oklahoma and chose the Sooners over TCU, Texas A&M, Oklahoma State and Colorado State. Guyron Allen (5-11, 205, 4.6) of West Orange (Stark), Texas, is cat quick and has averaged more than 125 tackles during his tenure as a three-year starter. Allen picked the Sooners over Houston and McNeese State.

Offensive lineman Chase Johnson of Shawnee Mission (Northeast), Kan., finished his season with 73 tackles and 9 sacks. Johnson has a visit set to Oklahoma. Johnson is also looking at Kansas State, Kansas, TCU and Nebraska ■

Mosley has narrowed his choices down to Nebraska, Tennessee and Arkansas.

Marvyn Godbolt (6-2, 175, 4.5) of San Antonio (Taft), Texas, plays free safety on the high school level, but his skills figure more at cornerback in college. Godbolt covers a tremendous amount of ground on

each play, showing great instincts as well as great athletic ability. An excellent tackler, Godbolt matches up in man coverage from his safety spot and has proven he can cover in man coverage. Nebraska has offered and is in a battle with Texas, Texas A&M, Baylor and TCU

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"I am trying to keep an open mind right now, but Nebraska is one of my favorite schools," Godbolt said. "I plan on going to Nebraska sometime in December, and I am still working to set my other visits."

Bobby Britton (5-11, 175, 4.35) of Jacksonville (Raines), Fla., is finally out of the shadow of Lito Sheppard, who was the prime time recruit at Raines last year. Britton can bench press 240 pounds and squat 420 and is an excellent kick returner as well. Britton likes Notre Dame, Nebraska, Florida State and Ohio State.

Riccardo Stewart (5-10, 185, 4.55) of La Quinta, Calif., is a combination wide receiver/cornerback who is looking at Nebraska as a corner-back. Stewart is one of the top 100 players on the West Coast. Currently, he favors Arizona State over USC, Nebraska, Colorado and Colorado State.

Lornell McPherson (5-9, 170, 4.4) of Omaha (Central), Neb., has already committed to Nebraska. He is having a great season as a slot back/defensive back and could be a great corner at Nebraska ■

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A Second Chance For The Huskers

*Surprisingly lopsided victory
boosts Nebraska back into contention*



**Mike
BABCOCK**

FOR A FEW HOURS, or even a day, Ralph Brown was going to allow himself to look ahead.

"I'm thinking about all the possibilities right now," the senior cornerback said after Nebraska's 41-15 victory against Kansas State. "As soon as Monday comes around, I'll focus on Colorado."

More specifically, he was thinking about what would have to happen in

order for the Cornhuskers to play for the national championship in the Sugar Bowl game on Jan. 4.

Three weeks ago, Nebraska's chances of getting to New Orleans for a title game depended on an unlikely series of events, which teammate Mike Brown characterized as "weird."

The Cornhuskers had been forced to amend their expectations, after losing at Texas.

Mike Brown was being realistic. Nebraska should focus on winning the Big 12 and set aside thoughts of playing for the national championship, the senior rover said.

Now, he's reconsidering, although "like I said, things still have to happen for us," he said.

"We just have to worry about what we do, honestly. I mean, we have to worry about what we do, take care of our business first. Then whatever happens is up to the other teams."

After the Texas loss, the other teams standing between Nebraska and a trip to the Bowl Championship Series national title game included several that have since fallen by the wayside.

On the day the Cornhuskers overwhelmed Kansas State, the No. 5 team in the polls as well as in the BCS standings, Tennessee, No. 2 in the BCS rankings, lost at Arkansas.

In addition, Penn State, which was only one place and less than a point behind Nebraska in the BCS rankings at No. 7, lost for a second time in as many weeks, falling to Michigan.

That eliminated the Nittany Lions from consideration.

And undefeated Mississippi State was upset by Alabama.

That leaves Nebraska within realistic reach of the top two places in the BCS rankings, along with undefeated Florida State and Virginia Tech and once-beaten Florida. At season's end, the top two teams get automatic Sugar

Bowl bids.

Virginia Tech would seem to be in the least precarious position among the four after defeating Miami decisively. The Hokies finish against Boston College, while Florida State must play Florida at Gainesville, in "the swamp," and Florida must win the Southeastern Conference championship game.

In order to have a national title chance, Nebraska would have to win at Colorado and then defeat Texas in a rematch in the Big 12 championship game at San Antonio on Dec. 4.

The Longhorns wrapped up the south division with a victory against Texas Tech.

The surprisingly lopsided victory against Kansas State boosted the Cornhuskers back into contention. "I think definitely our program made a big statement today as far as where we are in the national rankings or how good of a football team we really are," said quarterback Eric Crouch.

"There are going to be some things that have to fall into place.

"But we have to take one game at a time and just focus on what we can control."

First, Nebraska must win at Colorado. Otherwise, Kansas State could represent the north division in the Big 12 playoff

with a victory against Missouri. "I think we're playing well right now, but there are other teams around the country playing well, too," said Cornhusker coach Frank Solich.

"I feel good about our team and the fact we're moving in the right direction."

Nebraska wasn't moving in that direction three weeks ago, or even two, when it struggled at Kansas. But now the Cornhuskers are, and a trip to the Sugar Bowl doesn't seem so "weird."

If they can win out, they've got a chance. "Hopefully the system is going to put the two best teams in the national championship game, whoever that might be," Solich said.

For the time being, however, the team is focused on Colorado.

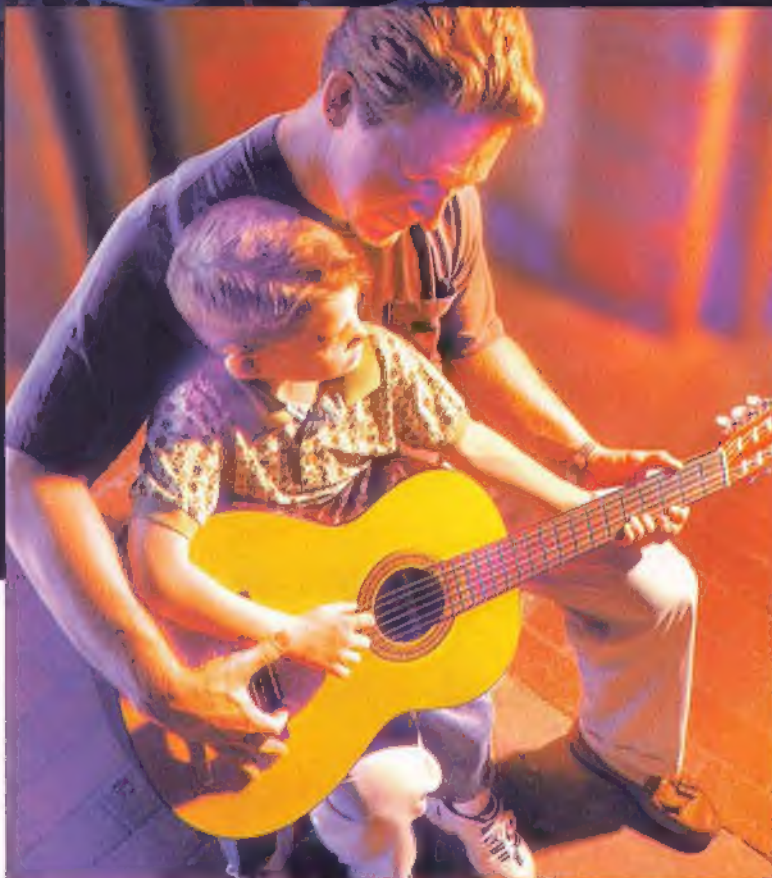
"The season's not over," said Ralph Brown. "Anything can happen." ■



Ralph Brown's fumble return was one of many big plays as the Huskers dumped Kansas State.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 20 years. Mike can be reached at mdb@inetnebr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

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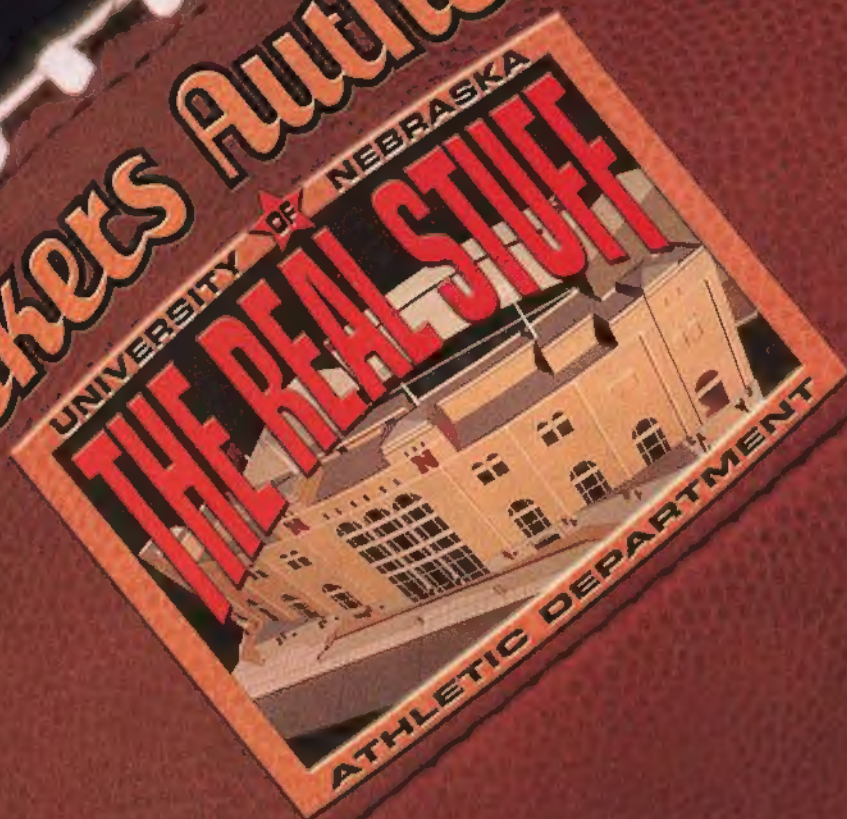


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